

Faculty of Media, Society and Culture

**Public Dignity, Private Turmoil:
An Anthropological Study of Celibacy and Sexual Intimacy in the
Roman Catholic Priesthood**

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

Signature:

Date:

Dedication

I hope and pray that this thesis may serve the
social, personal and spiritual good
of priests, priests' friends,
and all who read it.

Abstract

In the Roman Catholic Church, membership of the priesthood is confined to males who are canonically required to observe perpetual continence in celibacy. This requisite is upheld by the belief that priests mediate between God and mankind and that their “supernatural” status, reflected in celibacy, transcends the profane “natural” category of being, epitomized by sexual intimacy. Significant changes in the social and cultural contexts of the Church and the world, however, have seen increasing numbers of priests contesting this canon law from the perspective of their own, often contrary, experiences of celibacy and sexual intimacy. Calls for change have been strongly resisted by the papacy.

From a perspective of social poetics, this study methodically investigates the rhetorics used by the papacy and priests with friends respectively to promote their interests in celibacy and sexual intimacy. The papacy puts forward a total and singular vision of celibacy. In contrast, priests with friends identify contradictions between the universalised vision of the papacy and their locally situated experiences, inclusive of their intimate relationships. In endeavouring to resolve these contradictions, these priests produce disjunctions that separate their rhetorics of word and deed from that of the papacy’s rhetoric.

The rhetorics of the papacy and priests with friends are organized in a subset of rhetorics, namely, those that constitute faith and social order, position an individual in a social order, and radical change. Firstly, I examine how the hegemony of celibacy has been established and then eroded in ritual and in broader Catholic society. This erosion has resulted in an ideological struggle between the papacy and priests with friends. Secondly, I consider how the papacy and priests with friends construct and deconstruct morality, identity, and stereotypes within cultural intimacy. The papacy creates an abstract, universal and summarizing rhetoric of celibacy to uphold its total moral system. Priests with friends, however, construct a moral system that takes into account the complexities and contingencies of their lives and ministries. Thirdly, I examine how some of these priests use a rhetoric of radical change to promote their friendships in public. This analysis consequently indicates

marked differences in each rhetorical emphasis, and shows how these disagreements produce social dissonance within the priesthood and the Church.

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Conventions

Unless otherwise indicated, scripture quotations are from *The Harper Collins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version* (1993).

Gospel references use the customary short-form, for example, “Matthew” is cited as “Mt.”

Whenever quoting a priest, either from my own research or from another source, I have put their words into italics so that their rhetoric can be clearly identified.

I have quoted the pope’s Holy Thursday Letters, and noted them by year.

As is customary, dates given for the popes are for their papal reign.

Introduction: A Time for Listening

Prologue

Many years ago, I lived in a remote rural area that could be described as the “black hole” of the diocese. In my eleven years there, our parish was consecutively assigned five priests, four of whom faced significant personal hardship. Alone on the endless highways that traverse the Australian bush, each of these priests travelled long distances to make visitations to isolated farms and to celebrate Mass in outlying parish centres. In doing so, they confronted the limits of their humanity. As parish secretary, I saw these good men crumble, one after another. During this recurring situation, I felt powerless and questioned the ability of our parish to really care for these priests at a personal level. Eventually, this led me to query the religious motivation and social practice of celibacy;¹ a canonical obligation upheld by the papacy² that denies priests sexually intimate friendship.

Some years later, I moved to another parish where I met two women who had long-term relationships with priests. One of these friendships was terminated with tragic consequences. The priest friend of the other woman used to joke: *We’re just years ahead of our time, so we’re paving a way for the future!* “But why,” I asked, don’t you press for change now?” He responded: *It’s too risky and no one is prepared to really listen.* In the Church,³ no formal forums are available to discuss a host of questions that relate directly and indirectly to celibacy, and where a priest does make publicly known his reformist views and practices, representatives of the papacy duly sanction him. Lay people are also included in this veto on discussion; yet, despite such prohibitions, I decided to accept the challenge *to really listen* in order to understand the complexities and conflicts related to celibacy.

¹ The term “celibacy” is used throughout this thesis in reference to the canonical obligation as is defined by the papacy, unless otherwise stated. The use of this term is in no way meant to be read as minimising celibacy as a valid and valued state for priestly service, that is, independent of the canon.

² The papacy is a system of Church government. This complex organization is based upon episcopal leadership of dioceses, the geographical units into which the Church divides the world. These bishops are united to one another, and are collectively headed by the leadership of the pope. Through this form of governance, the papacy is able to control the moral and spiritual lives of millions of Catholics. Moreover, in this thesis, and unless otherwise stated, “the papacy” refers to the papacy of John Paul II.

³ While I acknowledge there are different meanings for church, for the sake of brevity, I have used the word “Church:” to refer to the Roman Catholic Church in this thesis, unless otherwise stated.

Listening, however, requires a particular attitude and, out of a respect for procedural fairness, I have chosen to examine both the rhetoric of faith, hierarchical order and control used by the papacy, and the rhetoric of faith, social order and resistance, used by priests who have sexually intimate friendships.⁴ By taking the middle ground, I consider how the papacy and each priest argue their case from their separate positions with sometimes shared and sometimes different resources in the priesthood. On the one hand, the papacy, from the apex of the Church, uses rhetoric that is abstract and universal to promote celibacy. These arguments are drawn primarily from faith and tradition, and are generally summarizing in character. On the other hand, priests with friends, from the periphery of the priesthood, use rhetoric that is local and specific to promote sexual intimacy as a valued and valid relationship for priests. The arguments of these priests are usually taken from faith and experience, and are, more often than not, highly personal. Thus, in this research, my attention focuses on how the papacy and priests with friends respectively negotiate belief and social order through celibacy and sexual intimacy. I then show how these different perspectives create conflict, expressed correspondingly through a rhetoric of control and a rhetoric of resistance. Such a conflict is methodologically useful, for both the papacy and priests with friends are required to make their logics clear, which effectively reveals what is at stake in this contest over celibacy and how this competition impacts upon the priesthood and Church.

An Outline of the Study

This study considers how the papacy uses rhetoric in various ways to put forward a total and singular vision of celibacy, and how priests with friends contest that vision through diverse idiomatic arguments that reflect their interests in sexual intimacy. In each rhetorical emphasis, the papacy is able to make arguments to support a particular aspect of celibacy. Priests with friends, however, identify contradictions between the universalised vision of the papacy and their locally situated experiences within each of these rhetorical emphases. Yet, in endeavouring to resolve these contradictions, these priests produce disjunctions that separate their rhetoric of word and deed from that of the papacy's rhetoric. By highlighting particular disjunctions

⁴ Hereafter, priests who are sexually intimate with their friends, will be referred to as "priests with friends." This term is analysed in chapter one, in the section "Dilemmas with Language."

within each rhetorical emphasis, and although these disjunctions can at the same time be recognized as a variation that can be expressed in a multitude of ways, I show how social dissonance is being produced within the priesthood and Church.

These rhetorical emphases have been organized in a subset of rhetorics, namely, those that constitute faith and social order, position an individual to social order, and radical change. Firstly, the rhetorics of faith and social order are ethnographically examined. When I consider the papacy's rhetoric, I select ethnographic material mainly from formal texts. I use this material to demonstrate how the papacy from its powerful position at the apex of the Church is able to promote its understanding of God's will⁵ for mankind.⁶ Such promotion is analysed from a trilogy of perspectives, namely, the Sacraments of Penance (Reconciliation) and Eucharist, and the Catholic social context. Interwoven into this trilogy is my investigation of celibacy on the periphery of the priesthood where priests test the veracity of its practice. In this research, ethnographic material is principally drawn from open-ended interviews and discussions with some priests in Australia, most of whom have sexually intimate friendships.⁷ I use material from these priests to show how they argue that the form of social order demanded by the papacy is inappropriate to their lives and ministries. Consequently, priests with friends seek to reconfigure social order by promoting the reform of celibacy, and the suitability of their friendships in which they recognize the presence of God.

Secondly, the rhetorics of positioning an individual priest in a social order are given attention. This subset of rhetorics is examined from the multiple perspectives of morality, identity, and stereotypes. By defining the official moral position of the priesthood and the formal identity of the priest, both of which are bound up in celibacy, the papacy is able to ensure priests publicly uphold its practice. Celibacy, however, is also made socially operative in stereotypes, which pressure each priest to

⁵ In this thesis, an analysis of the divine does not take into account the question of the existence of God. Rather, examination is given to how the papacy and priests with friends respectively understand how God's will can be best understood and applied to their lives and ministries.

⁶ Refer to the section "Dilemmas with Language," chapter one, with regards to the use of this exclusive term.

⁷ Hereafter, priests who are sexually intimate with their friends, will be referred to as "priests with friends." This term is analysed in chapter one, in the section "Dilemmas with Language."

conform to a standardized image of priesthood. Yet, massive religious and social changes within the Church and in the world have prompted some priests to reconsider their obligation to celibacy. These priests have subsequently identified contradictions in the way they have been positioned in the social order and seek to renegotiate their situation. As a result, each priest with a friend considers his relationship is imbued with a moral good. He also contends that this friendship is advantageous to his life and ministry and, consequently, his identity is instilled with this new understanding. Having established a meaningful morality and identity, each priest is then able to contest stereotypes through informal and ingenious ways that seek to bring about reform in the priesthood.

Priests with friends, however, are able to take their rhetoric of resistance one step further. Having undergone a conversion in which they have recognized a relevant social order that meaningfully accommodates a renewed understanding of themselves, and having become skilled in negotiating the rhetoric of control used by the papacy, these priests are now masters of the rules of priesthood. Consequently, priests with friends are cautiously exchanging their rhetoric of resistance with a rhetoric of radical change. Thus, I examine how these priests are subtly incorporating their friendships, through a rhetoric of word and deed, into their ordinary everyday priestly practices.

Brief Overview of Theory

Given the multifaceted character of celibacy, and the ensuing discord between the papacy and priests with friends, Herzfeld's (1997) versatile theoretical approach, explicated in his text, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*⁸ is a useful guide for exploring the manifold networks of engagement in the priesthood. In *Cultural Intimacy*, Herzfeld attempts to explore people's understanding of themselves, especially "those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality" (Herzfeld 1997, p. 3). While the social theory of Herzfeld has its ethnographic origins in the geographical borders of the Greek nation-state, I show how its theoretical approach is useful for extending the analytical

⁸ For the sake of brevity, hereafter Herzfeld's text will be referred to as *Cultural Intimacy*.

insights of other cultures that have different understandings of social boundaries, such as those located in world religions. Consequently, I have modified and expanded the theoretical scheme used by Herzfeld, guided by ethnographical evidence, to elucidate diverse aspects of celibacy and the interrelations between the papacy and priests with friends over this issue.

My work is located in social poetics, which rests on Berger and Luckman's (1966) principle that social actors continually construct culture for present purposes, and in this hive of activity, each actor's actions are imbued with symbolic meaning. By reaching deep into the experiential dynamics of the human condition, we can have access to unfamiliar worlds in which multiple aspects of people's social practices are illuminated (Fernandez 1996, p. 853). This anthropological act of bringing these practices to the fore helps us to discover the relational connections between events and ideas, which can add to our understanding of how people negotiate their lives within a culture. The papacy and priests with friends, therefore, can be seen to be continuously engaged with each other through various forms of rhetoric that aim to respectively control or resist celibacy. In this symbolic interplay of words and deeds, each priest endeavours to choose and create persuasive acts to ensure his present purposes are invested with cultural veracity that affects his inclusion in the priesthood. Yet, the rhetoric of priests with friends is considered culturally embarrassing, so this aspect of the social dimension is concealed behind the official façade of the priesthood. This social process of hiding marginal practices is recognized and referred to in this thesis, as it is by Herzfeld, as cultural intimacy.

The concept of cultural intimacy provides an appropriate theoretical context in which to situate my analysis of social acts within the priesthood, for this concept is able to explain the continual movement between the seemingly permanent discipline of celibacy and the respective rhetorical strategies of the papacy and priests with friends. Such negotiations, however, can become problematic if revelations of concerns and conflicts are made known. Both the papacy and each priest know that their lives and ministries are secured by hierarchical position and moral reputation, which convey static messages to outsiders of unchanging leadership, immutable power, and eternal authority. The onus is, therefore, on both the papacy and priests with friends to protect the sanctity and social status of the priesthood; hence, there is

a preference for alternative interests and activities to remain private, away from the spotlight that could produce public shame, social upheaval, and political challenge. This preference for discretion is further aided by social expectations that priests live celibate lives. Such social cover enables priests with friends to engage in illicit relationships whilst maintaining social status and privilege. Nevertheless, the official façade of celibacy also has the capacity to make life difficult for these entrepreneurial priests.

One of these difficulties lies in the fact that the priesthood is not a level playing field. The papacy, privileged with high social status and access to abundant resources, is in a position to formally promote its belief that God desires priests to observe celibacy. Such rhetoric is additionally bolstered by the bureaucratic implementation of fixed doctrine and canon law. The papacy is able to claim that the priesthood is uniformly celibate which, as a result, pressures priests to acquiesce to these doctrinal fictions, a social process that is theoretically referred to as hegemony. Hegemony occurs when one social class achieves dominance, not through overt force but rather through the consent of the masses, constituted in various groups. The papacy, as the dominant social class, can continue to exercise hegemony while it is able to convince the subaltern⁹ class of priests that they should uphold and sustain its ideology of celibacy. Yet, the task of maintaining such an ideology is difficult because ongoing social relations expressed in ritual and everyday life, disrupt the timeless inventions of the papacy. In diverse local contexts, each priest must negotiate celibacy in his life and ministry. Some priests, however, find the meaning of celibacy is much more ambiguous than the doctrine and discipline of celibacy allows and, consequently, they resolve questions about its practice in ways that are at odds with the papacy's stance. Thus, hegemony is a social process that is never fixed in time, and its erosion signifies separation between the dominant social class and subaltern individuals and groups.

The exercise of hegemony, however, involves covert force, a form of control that does not predominate excessively over consent. The papacy imposes controlling

⁹ The term "subaltern" is a "concept implying a dialectical relationship of superordination and subordination, a concept which is of importance in analysing the interplay of this relationship" (Gupta 2001, p. 109).

mechanisms such as the Sacraments of Penance (Reconciliation) and Eucharist, and canon law. The employment of these mechanisms appears to be based on the consent of the masses, but such use effectively protects the leadership and power of the dominant group by pressuring subalterns to return to the ideological system. Hence, the papacy is advantaged by a rhetoric of control that pressures priests to ritually and socially return to a prelapsarian state and accept without question their obligation to celibacy. Yet, between consent and force stands corruption. The uncompromising attitude of the papacy pressures some priests with friends to construct a rhetoric of resistance that subsequently increases anomalies and weaknesses in the papacy's position, thereby threatening its ability to provide leadership in the priesthood and Church. Therefore, once a subaltern social class questions the universal interests of a dominant social class, there is a crisis in hegemony, which often results in the latter attempting to reassert its control by quelling opposition.

Being in conflict, however, assumes the possibility of social commonality, a notion that is impressed into the foundation of the theory of cultural intimacy. For instance, the papacy and priests with friends each share rhetorical strategies, which they use to make respective claims about celibacy and sexual intimacy. One of these strategies employs etymologies that are used to create moral boundaries. By selecting certain passages of history, and then essentializing and reifying these etymological constructions, the papacy and priests with friends are able to respectively argue the veracity of their moral claims. The papacy, for instance, constructs etymologies that promote celibacy by using evidence of previous canons of celibacy as a basis for its claims of an ongoing tradition of celibacy. Priests with friends, however, allude to a broader reading of history and point out the discontinuities of its practices by their priestly forebears, and the often-negative consequences of these ancient canons, thereby subtly advocating a new set of moral boundaries. Hegemony, therefore, is dependent on moral consensus but when subalterns question that agreement, a society can become embroiled in ideological struggle.

Another important rhetorical strategy used by both the papacy and each priest with a friend is that which is technically known as iconicity. The papacy and priests with friends create images that respectively produce resemblances between celibacy and

priesthood to establish priestly identity. The papacy, on the one hand, constructs particular images of Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and various saints to create a celibate identity for the priest. Additionally, the papacy has devised kinship metaphors that are used to produce resemblances with celibacy; thus, the priest is commonly referred to as “Father,” which symbolically negates sexual relations with the laity, who are implicitly considered “children.” Priests with friends, on the other hand, question the veracity of these images. As a result, these priests construct alternative images sourced from scripture and contemporary life to assert their claim that sexual intimacy is compatible with priesthood. Meanwhile, the images promoted by the papacy can be actualized in the broader Catholic context through hegemony. In this process, priests are pressured to conform to the stereotype of celibacy. Yet, priests with friends, who recognize the limits of these oversimplified standard images, attempt to rhetorically contest such fixed conceptions. In the battle for the legitimacy of morality and identity, the dominant social class and subalterns objectify each other in order to reduce the veracity of one another’s rhetoric.

Subalterns, no longer believing what they used to believe, attempt to win the hearts and minds of the masses through a radical change of position. Priests with friends endeavour to replace their rhetoric of resistance with one of innovation. In this process, these priests master and merge popular notions of “the typical priest” with the “ordinariness” of friendship, a social fusion that they express in public. By replacing celibate expectations with friendship, these local-level performances can incrementally affect change. However, there are limits to the radical practices of priests with friends. Celibacy is not just about the papacy imposing its belief system, and arrogating to itself social prerogatives and moral privileges, it is also the religious, social and political process in which priests with friends use rhetoric to negotiate alternative concepts of celibacy and sexual intimacy that are meaningful to their lives and ministries. Ideological struggle, therefore, seeks social synthesis in an emergent hegemony, which indicates a necessity for the eventual exposure of cultural intimacy.

Significance

This research fills considerable gaps in both the literatures of anthropology and the Church. Specifically, in anthropology, minimal research has been given to how

celibacy can be used in the construction and production of social organization. In contrast, within the Church, significant independent research has been conducted on celibacy, and these studies indicate that celibacy creates substantial problems for large numbers of priests. Indeed, the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry (1989, pp. 500-501) concludes,

Generally every study or commentary done on the priesthood and shortage of vocations mentions sexuality (and specifically mandatory celibacy) as a major reason (a) for leaving the priesthood, (b) for the shortage of vocations and (c) for loneliness and personal unhappiness of those who stay.

Nonetheless, much of this research fails to explain why celibacy is being retained in the priesthood and why sexual intimacy continues to be rejected by the papacy as a legitimate practice for priests. There is also a dearth of information about the significance of celibacy in the current sexual organization of the Church. As one priest noted: *No one else is touching this issue in Australia. You're out in the desert with this one, which speaks much of its taboo and its importance.*

Furthermore, priests with friends have no public profile. Within the Church these priests are officially unseen and unheard. If they express difficulties or complaints about celibacy, they are ridiculed or silenced. If their intimate encounters with their friends are exposed, their sexual activity is considered shameful and they are condemned as sinners. Meanwhile, the papacy allows for no canonical recourse for these priests, for it has effectively removed celibacy as a subject of discussion and disallows official inquiry into celibacy's consequences. Yet, despite the legal and social restrictions, the dissent over celibacy by priests with friends is having an effect on the overall religious, social and political orientation of the priesthood. This is evidenced by the diverse sexual crises that are currently plaguing the priesthood, including significant numbers of priests leaving the official priesthood to marry, increased numbers of seminarians and priests who are homosexual,¹⁰ the illicit sexual activity of priests, and clerical sexual abuse of both adults and minors. I, therefore, hope this analysis of celibacy and sexual intimacy will contribute to an

¹⁰ According to Catholic doctrine, "Homosexual persons are called to chastity" [because] "homosexual acts are [considered] intrinsically disordered" (*Catechism of the Church* 1994, p. 566).

understanding of why the papacy is experiencing problems with celibacy, why priests are increasingly finding it difficult to conform to celibacy, and why dissension is likely to continue in the priesthood if the practice is not formally re-evaluated.

The theoretical insights used in this thesis may also be usefully applied to the wider social field of sexual relations, internal and external to the Church. The theory of cultural intimacy, coloured with that of hegemony, indicates that such personally intimate experiences are shaped by culture. Thus, within the Church, categorical groups that are adversely affected by the papacy's stance on celibacy and sexuality in general may find this theoretical approach useful in their quest for policies of inclusion. Such groups include men and women who use contraception, women who seek ordination, divorced and separated persons, homosexual men and women, priests who have left to marry, and friends of priests. In addition, the basic worldview of the vast majority in the Western world is Christian, and an anthropological effort to understand the sexual strategies that have been used in history would be useful to this society.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is presented in eight chapters, each of which represents a distinct contribution to understanding the way in which the papacy and priests with friends respectively negotiate celibacy and sexual intimacy. The first chapter lays out the principal foundations on which rest the analyses of the separate arguments, as well as the consequent social dissonance between the papacy and priests with friends. These consist of a literature review of celibacy both in anthropology and in the Church, an overview of the tradition of the theoretical view, and the methodology used in this research.

Chapter two is the first of three chapters that examine the rhetorics of faith and social order. In this chapter, I examine how the papacy essentializes the character of a priest in a total identity, inclusive of celibacy, which is maintained through the controlling mechanisms of a promise or vow to celibacy and the Sacrament of Penance. Priests with friends, however, perceive celibacy to be injurious to their wholeness and well-being. Consequently, these priests resist celibacy by contracting friendships and, as a result, renegotiate controlling mechanisms in order to

accommodate their friendships within the priesthood. The third chapter focuses attention on the way in which Eucharist is used to socially order priests within the Church. This ritual, however, can have dual interpretations that have respective implications for celibacy and sexual intimacy. The papacy and some priests who were interviewed recognize the interpretation of Eucharist as sacrifice, which includes that sacrifice entailed in celibacy. Meanwhile, some priests with friends have recognized hegemony at work, and have replaced the preferred understanding of the papacy with an interpretation of Eucharist as a communal meal, which has a positive significance for sexual intimacy. The rhetorics of social order are also made apparent in the broader Catholic context. In chapter four, social order as reflected in the family, school, seminary, the wider Church and world, is examined in order to show how the practices of these institutions have impacted upon priests' understandings of celibacy. This examination is followed by an analysis of the erosion of hegemony, and the consequences this has for priests with friends.

In chapters five, six and seven, I consider how the papacy and its local representatives and priests with friends respectively position an individual priest in social order. In chapter five, I examine the rhetorical strategies of the papacy by unravelling the etymological constructions that constitute claims made of tradition, which is used to establish celibacy as a moral condition. Subsequently, an investigation is made of priests with friends' alternative readings of tradition and history, and the consequent strategies they use to promote the immorality of celibacy and the morality of sexual intimacy. The struggle over priestly identities is then examined in the sixth chapter in which I identify and deconstruct key images used by the papacy to promote celibacy. Interwoven in the analyses of each of these images, are the arguments that priests with friends make to contest these representations, which essentially propose a reordering of these priests to the priesthood and Church. In chapter seven, I analyse how these images of celibacy are actualised in the broader Catholic context. By socially linking an image of celibacy to a priest, a priest is reduced to a stereotype that allows for no differentiation. Priests with friends, however, identify the limits of this oversimplified standard and consequently resist such a stereotype through rhetorics of resistance, which includes a critique of locally crafted stereotypes and joking.

The final chapter examines the respective worldviews of the papacy and priests with friends, which impacts upon their respective arguments about celibacy. While the papacy promotes a classical worldview in which celibacy is implicit, some Western priests who favour a modern worldview resist the homogeneous character of the former worldview. The rhetorical quest of authenticity for priest with friends is then examined, as are their subtle and variegated efforts to publicly present their friendships as an ordinary feature of their everyday lives and ministries. A review of the chapters and a conclusion complete this thesis, which provides a comprehensive understanding of what is at stake in the priesthood: either a continuation of a very old form of sexual organization with celibate priests continuing to minister from the hierarchical helm or a new form of priesthood that is inclusive of sexual intimacy.

CHAPTER ONE

An Assessment of the Social Landscape: Literature, Theory and Method

Anthropology has had an enduring interest in sexuality and gender, but little attention has been given to the sexuality of Catholic priests. Meanwhile, within the Church, much has been written about celibacy, yet, officially, minor consideration has been given to its religious and social effects. This chapter reviews relevant literatures that have been produced by anthropology and the Church. Consideration is then given to how these two fields can be brought into conversation in order to realise new ways for understanding this cultural phenomenon, including its counterpart, sexual intimacy. Next, the tradition of the theoretical view will be examined to situate this study in anthropology. In this section, I indicate how these theories will be adapted and extended in my study. This is followed by an exposition of the methods used to conduct this research and analyse ethnographical evidence. Some attention is also given to obstacles encountered in undertaking this research.

Celibacy in the Anthropological Context

Within the field of anthropology, very little has been written specifically on the subject of celibacy and sexual intimacy, let alone in the specific context of religion. Friedl (1994, pp. 833-844) gives some insight as to why that may be the case. Anthropologists generally consider participant observation to be the basic technique for undertaking research because it allows the ethnographer to compare rhetoric with observed actions. Yet, observing celibacy or sexual relations, the latter, which in virtually all human societies is hidden from the gaze of onlookers, challenges this fundamental commitment. In relation to religion, Beers (1992, pp.163-4) says anthropologists may belong to the religious traditions that they would be studying, which might provoke narcissism, something that they find easier to avoid when studying other religions. He also argues that the academic disciplines of history, sociology and theology have laid claim to studying Christianity, leaving anthropology languishing in this field (1992, p. 163). Nevertheless, in recent years a small number of anthropologists have seen the need to examine celibacy, although not in conjunction with its apparent rival, sexual intimacy

One of the few texts that examine celibacy is the work produced by Sobo and Bell (2001). This edited volume includes diverse perspectives that aim “to explore ... examples of the occurrences, perceptions and meanings of celibacy” (2001, p. 3). Divided into three parts, this work gives attention to the relationships between celibacy and the social organization of kinship, celibacy in cultural systems, and the ways in which choice and control can govern an individual’s practice of celibacy. While most of the book is devoted to voluntary celibacy, some chapters deal with imposed celibacy, including one written by a Catholic priest who, as an “observer participant,” gives his viewpoint of celibacy in the Church (Southgate 2001, pp. 246-263). Although this volume indicates that there is a multiplicity of motivations, cultural values and cultural systems in which celibacy is practised, I consider its definition of celibacy as being “nonparticipation in sex” (Sobo and Bell 2001, p. 4) as limited. This narrow view of celibacy overlooks the way in which a social actor continuously negotiates its practice, both intimately and within broader religious and social contexts. As well, this grand comparative canvas does not significantly attend to the institutional embeddedness of celibacy. The lodging of celibacy in an organization by Sobo and Bell effectively renders the meaning of this practice static rather than dynamic. From this latter perspective, ongoing social relations continuously shape celibacy. I therefore propose that the control of celibacy by an institution can create substantial difficulties for individuals and categorical groups, which may result in social dissonance.

Literatures that deal with celibacy in religions other than Christianity are peripheral to this study because each religion is distinctly different; consequently, each has a very different understanding of celibacy. These studies cannot take into account the extraordinarily dissimilar beliefs and experiences of priests, or the social order of the Church in which celibacy is located.¹¹ Closer to home is the dissertation on celibacy

¹¹ For example, religions of the Indic culture, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism practice forms of sexual abstinence, yet, these practices are shaped by significantly different religious ideas and structures than those of Christianity. While there are many variations of thought and practice, the Indic religions appear to share a common idea in which the spiritual world is real, while the physical, material world is an illusion. This idea is also the basis of these religions’ practice of *brahmacharya*, defined as celibacy in Sanskrit dictionaries, which ultimately leads the practitioner to liberation from an illusory existence. In a brief comparison of Indic religions with Christianity, they are almost the mirror-opposite in viewpoint. Christianity interprets physical existence as reality, and heaven as being the object of salvation, a celestial actuality not yet realised. Physical life is also understood to be

cont.

by Beaudette's (1994) in which he analyses the historical rationales for celibacy from the fourth century to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) using the work of Mary Douglas. By viewing celibacy as a condensed symbol in which the physical body is used as a symbol of the social body, Beaudette is able to relate the development of celibacy's legislation, expressed in rules of ritual purity, to the boundary concerns of the Church. While this rationale for celibacy was dropped at the Second Vatican Council, Beaudette is able to show that the papacy is holding onto these jettisoned meanings through eschatological language, in order to maintain a rigid boundary-relation with the world. Such historical research certainly informs this study of celibacy in the priesthood; yet, its analytical emphasis on a chain of legislative events and doctrine concentrates too much on the perspective of the papacy and does not elucidate participation and negotiation of an individual priest in the religious and social production of these proceedings. This dearth of ethnographic study suggests that there is significant need for research on celibacy and sexual intimacy in the priesthood.

Celibacy in the Context of the Church

Since the Second Vatican Council, which initiated the current debate on celibacy, there has been a veritable torrent of published material on this issue, much of which consists of theological and historical treatises, and none of which considers this from an ethnographical and anthropological perspective, as does this research. Within these accounts, there can be identified two major bodies of work that have a significant impact on priests' lives. The first collection can be described as the dominant discourse of celibacy that constructs, promotes and maintains its practice. These literatures generally have their origins in statements made about celibacy in the conciliar document on the priesthood, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (Abbott 1967, pp. 565-567). This decree asserts Christ recommended celibacy, and that his advocacy for the practice is expressed in scripture, as exemplified in Mt. 19:10-12. Selected scripture passages in which the apostle Paul promotes celibacy are also used to

essentially good but people must conform to the laws and teachings of the Church, lest their sins estrange them from God's grace. Secondly, in contrast to Catholicism, Indic religions have no doctrinal or ecclesiastical hierarchy and *brahmacharya* is not confined to an elite group. Indic ascetic practices also differ fundamentally from those in Christianity, in intent if not practice, because they are not grounded in body-soul dualism. Ascetics do not aim to deny their bodies but to subject themselves to disciplines that enhance mental qualities and spirituality.

support the doctrine and canons of the priesthood. In addition, sweeping reference is made to celibacy being a tradition. The third focus is on claims that celibacy is congruent with priesthood on many scores. Celibacy is said to be an eschatological witness to the life hereafter, and a priest in dedicating himself to that belief should therefore be free from the distractions and hindrances of family life so as to enable him to have more time, mobility and independence for his function of community reminder and focus (Anderson 1998, p. 30). Celibacy is further understood to be a “gift” of God that will be generously bestowed on priests if all in the Church pray for it. Moreover, rebuttal is given to those who raise doubts concerning its practice; concomitantly, priests are requested to ensure celibacy is upheld by using supernatural and particularly ascetical practices that have been promoted in the priesthood.

Since then, official writing on celibacy has increased in volume though not necessarily in diversity of content. Principal amongst these works are the annual Holy Thursday Letters that aim to address various concerns of priests, particularly those relating to identity and ministry. In the first of these letters, written in 1979, emphasis is given to the priest as *persona Christi*¹² whose central task is to make Eucharistic sacrifice on behalf of the people. This carving out of an exclusive identity for the priest is further shaped by commentary on celibacy. Again, other persons’ objections to celibacy are denounced because they apparently do not take into account determined criteria located in “the Gospel, Tradition and the Church’s Magisterium”¹³ (John Paul II 1998 (1979), p. 354). Further Holy Thursday Letters that comment on celibacy include those that are dated 1982, 1988, 1993, 1995, and 1996. Of particular interest is the 1995 Letter, which gives a theological appraisal to the ideal relationship between priests and women, stating that these relationships must “not admit of ambiguity” (John Paul II 1995, p. 473). This text formally acknowledges, albeit implicitly, that some priests do have sexually intimate friendships with women (and men), and that these relationships call into question the official belief system and blur hierarchical boundaries. Thus, the papacy seeks to curtail such friendships by asserting its ideal, thereby restoring the *status quo*.

¹² Latin for “in the person of Christ.”

¹³ The Magisterium is the teaching authority of the Church constituted by papacy.

The apostolic exhortation, “I Will Give You Shepherds” primarily focuses on priestly formation and begins with an account of the priesthood, which is said to be said to be “definitive[ly]” manifested in the person of Jesus (John Paul II 1992, p. 13). Much of this exhortation considers the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation of the priest. Within this text, the practice of celibacy is explained “in the fullness of its biblical, theological and spiritual richness, as a precious gift given by God to his Church” (John Paul II 1992, p. 56). Celibacy, as apparently modelled by the life of Jesus, is argued to sit well with that radical openness of the Gospel in that it signifies an index of one’s acceptance of that call. It also aims to encourage priests to achieve “affective maturity” in which priests are to love and be loved whilst preserving their celibacy. Another key document is an address delivered by Pope John Paul (1993), dealing specifically with celibacy. In this document, examples from scripture are used to support the argument that “renunciation of family life” is appropriate for priests. Mention is also given to the retention of the law of celibacy for “spiritual” reasons, asserting that singleness is better suited for a priest’s role, and that celibacy has primacy over every other possible source of “spiritual fruitfulness.” Again, the priest is promoted as an eschatological witness of the life hereafter, and this stance cannot be evaluated from a purely rational standpoint, but only through faith. These arguments are promoted as “lofty, noble spiritual reasons” for celibacy’s retention (John Paul II 1993, p. 11).

As evidenced, this major body of works rests its case on particular readings of scripture and tradition. Firstly, these readings draw general principles: the current terms of the debate do not consider the historical and social contexts that are used to support celibacy. Secondly, this literature indicates that it is the responsibility of each and every priest to practise celibacy; however, no consideration is given to how priests deal with the paradoxes that abstract doctrines produce. Thirdly, by emphasising the duty of the individual priest to uphold celibacy, this literature avoids discussing the collective and social responsibility of the Church in this matter. Fourthly, this review indicates that there is resistance in the dominant discourse to any alternative readings of celibacy. Consequently, other possibilities located in scripture and history are overlooked, theological options are discredited, and no discussion is given to political or experiential perspectives of celibacy and sexual

intimacy in the priesthood. In effect, these dominant literatures stridently direct the terms of engagement in the debate by silencing concerns that do not fit within its parameters. Hence, there is considerable scope for undertaking a comprehensive study of celibacy and sexual intimacy. This includes: contemporary biblical exegesis; historical analysis of traditional claims; evaluation of individual priests' experiences of celibacy and sexual intimacy in their everyday life and their consequent theologies and spiritualities; assessment of the religious social and political impact on their lives and ministries.

The second major body of works in the Church is a literature that advocates the reform of celibacy, and such texts take a variety of forms. From the viewpoint of scripture, Vogel's (1992) *Celibacy – Gift or Law* critically engages with the dominant discourse. In this exegesis, gifts are characterised as unconditionally given by God. Therefore, celibacy is not conditional upon priesthood. Consequently, prayer's aim is for perseverance in the gift, not its attainment. Furthermore, it was not until the Second Vatican Council that discussion was given to the charism required by celibates, yet it did not draw any conclusions from this with regard to the law. Exegesis is further given to scripture passages that indicate the apostles and their fellow-workers, as well as bishops, were allowed wives. The historical beginnings of legislation are also examined, which according to Vogels (1992, p. 16), originated from the morally misunderstood cultic requirements of the Hebrews and Hellenist ideas that insisted there was an incompatibility between sexual intercourse and priestly service. Another work in this genre is Crosby (1996) who argues that claims based on the New Testament for celibacy are a misuse of scripture; celibacy is used as a means of maintaining control through fear and intimidation, the theology and practice of celibacy is replete with internal contradictions, and an enforced celibacy has led to dysfunctional behaviours by priests.

Considerable numbers of psychological and sociological studies have also found celibacy wanting. The earliest of these studies includes the psychological investigation of American priests by Kennedy and Heckler (1972). This research

indicated that a large proportion of the priests were underdeveloped.¹⁴ These priests are genuinely uneasy about intimacy, which is “one of the most important challenges of adult life,” and “sexual feelings are a source of conflict and difficulty.” Celibacy “creates a situation which makes it genuinely difficult for them to continue their development” (Kennedy and Heckler 1972, pp. 9, 11, 13). More recently published is the psychoanalytical study on sexuality by Sipe (1990), which examines the origins of celibacy and then from a backdrop of the 1960s sexual revolution, investigates the specific areas of celibate/sexual practice among priests,¹⁵ and the process and attainment of celibacy. Sipe concludes that while celibacy “practiced and achieved ... has a great deal to contribute to the understanding of the human condition,” the “preservation of the male matrix and the monosexual structure of power is not essential to celibate practice and achievement” (1990, pp. 281, 282). He also questions the broader sexual teachings of the Church, and then proposes a theology of sexuality that is located in a lived reality. In another work, Sipe (1995) explicates how celibacy is a factor in the power system of the Church and is intimately connected with abuses of power.

In the realm of sociological studies, the work of Schoenherr and Young (1993) stands out. In this study, examination is given to the shortage of priests in the United States, which is situated in a historical and global perspective of clergy growth and decline. Schoenherr and Young conclude, “the church is being confronted with a choice between its sacramental tradition and its commitment to an exclusively male celibate priesthood” (1993, p. 353). Other studies in this genre also indicate negative findings against celibacy, including (Hout and Greeley n.d.; Verdieck, Shields and Hoge 1998; Australian Association for the Pastoral Renewal of the Catholic Clergy 1988). A massive amount of literature, such as that produced by the secular media and various reform groups which report dissident activities in the priesthood, also comes within this body of works. Some of these sources refer to celibate anomalies and structural contradictions, while other texts frame arguments through particular readings of scripture, history, and experience that promote priestly alternatives,

¹⁴ This means that these priests have reached a level of overall personal growth that is not equal to that which is expected of them at their age and in view of their careful selection and lengthy training (Kennedy and Heckler 1972, p. 7).

¹⁵ These practices include: heterosexuality, homosexuality, masturbation, paedophilia, sexual compromises, the sex drive, and when priests become fathers.

including that of a married priesthood. An example of this latter genre is Rice (1991) in which the current state of the priesthood is examined from the perspective of resigned priests. Nevertheless, while these literatures certainly inform a study of celibacy and sexual intimacy, they position themselves squarely with those priests who desire unequivocal reform. Clearly, resigned priests do not take an intermediate stance that examines the positions of the papacy and priests with friends. Furthermore, these studies generally concentrate on the struggles of priests who have already left the priesthood, and tend not to explore those priests who make efforts to overcome their difficulties whilst remaining in the priesthood. Therefore, a study of the priesthood centred in the middle ground that analyses the dissonance between official and social perspectives can make a distinctive contribution, and anthropology is uniquely placed to provide that social analysis.

Tradition of the Theoretical View

Anthropology is able to consider the development of an overall view of social life in which questions of meaning come to the fore. In order to incorporate and elaborate this analytical view in this study, I modify, as stated above, the grand theoretical scheme used in Herzfeld's *Cultural Intimacy* (1997). This section examines the traditions behind that theoretical approach to analysing social life. I also demonstrate how I adapt and extend Herzfeld's understanding of social poetics in ways that are appropriate to this study. Firstly, the general theoretical focus of this thesis is situated in people's search for meaning. This emphasis can be traced back to Weber (Gerth and Mills 1974) followed by Dilthey (Rickman 1976) and later Turner (1982; 1986), who argue that meaning is central to the life of social actors. These understandings are decisive factors in organizing a culture, particularly in periods of social change. Thus, this broad theoretical view aims to explicate diverse rhetorical emphases used by the papacy and priests with friends to negotiate meaning with the priesthood and Church.

Particular concepts are also employed to examine each form of rhetoric. One idea that is used to understand how social order is constructed is that of Douglas' (1966) notion of purity. According to Douglas, all societies have rules of purity that are derived from a social understanding of what is dirty or clean. Polluting behaviours of the body, for example, signal social change, ambiguity and compromise, and

contradict valued social classifications; consequently, rituals of purity are employed to restore clear definition of the social body. Herzfeld has shown how we can profitably adapt these notions of purity, when he analyses the reconciliation practices used by the state and Church¹⁶ and sheep thieves. The state and Church consider they must intervene in lawless local-level practices to prevent a final collapse of civic morality, while the sheep thieves consider that the collapse of morality in the state and the Church is what justifies their intervention. Each of these groups attacks the essentialist practices of the other with rhetorical strategies that are based on respective constructions of structural nostalgia, the latter concept reflecting the Maussian ideal of once-perfect reciprocity. In my thesis, both Douglas' original concept and Herzfeld's application of this idea are employed and reworked into an analysis of the controlling mechanisms used by the papacy and priests with friends. By examining the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation), for instance, I analyse the efficacy of the papacy's rhetoric to control the social order through celibacy. Likewise, by examining the idiomatic arguments that priests with friends use to negotiate these mechanisms, I can recognize how these priests construct a rhetoric of resistance to promote their preferred model of social order for the priesthood and Church.

Another theoretical focus that shapes the analysis of social order is derived from the work of Evans-Prichard, *The Nuer* (1968). This study presents lineage as a system of political relationships characterised by segmentation in which distance determines agnatic relations. This social order expresses itself fully in blood feud and as a result, political relationships work out agnatic values necessary to cohere the lineage system. Herzfeld gives Evans-Prichard's insight agency and uses it to explain the consequences of a nationalist rhetoric in which the state literalises metaphors of blood relationship to unite a country. However, this literalist practice creates social and political distance because the state does not take into account local-level idioms of social solidarity. The production of this ideological gulf consequently leads to serious disputes between the state and ethnic minorities, which can result in the shedding of blood. In my thesis, I rework this idea to amplify my assertion that Catholic agnatic values are worked out through Eucharist; thus, some are prevented

¹⁶ When the phrase "the state and Church" is used, the Church referred to here is the Greek Orthodox Church.

from receiving, others can only share, while a select few preside over and confect the Cup of Christ's blood. Membership to the Catholic family is therefore dependent upon maintaining the appropriate hierarchical ranking organized through Eucharist, the converse being religious and social exclusion. The papacy's literalization of these blood relationships has, however, produced intended and unintended consequences. By forgoing sexually intimate relationships, priests can secure their place in the priesthood, but in some cases, this comes at a cost of wholeness and well-being, and sometimes the life of a priest.

To further analyse the construction of social order, I use the concept of hegemony, as originally developed by Gramsci (1971). Gramsci used this term to describe how the domination of one social class over others is achieved by a combination of political and ideological means, and although political force is important, the role of ideology in winning the consent of dominated classes is even more significant. Herzfeld has modified the concept of hegemony by unlocking social actors from ideological predestination in which the possibility of independent agency is all but precluded. By examining the rhetorics of everyday life that are strikingly marginal to international power structures, Herzfeld breaches hegemonic forms such as a recourse to unitary History that is used to deny minority interests. He also shows how local elites are put in a difficult position because they cannot afford to admit to the conflict of interests between the state and ethnic minorities, which results in internal disunities. Yet, the refusal of local elites to acknowledge such fissures saps their credibility before knowledgeable audiences (Herzfeld 1997, p. 92). By appropriating these theoretical ideas to my research, I am able to show how the hegemony of celibacy works through ritual and in broader Catholic society. I then demonstrate how priests with friends are contesting hegemony in these contexts, what impact this challenge has on local elites, and why this resistance subsequently results in an ideological struggle over celibacy at the universal and local levels of the Church.

In order to analyse a rhetoric of ideology, which positions individuals in social order, I draw on the etymological ideas of Vico (Hawkes 1977). This Italian philosopher, in his quest for understanding how societies and institutions are created, determined that "man constructs the myths, the social institutions, virtually the whole world as

he perceives it, and in so doing he constructs himself” (Hawkes 1977, p. 14). Through this ongoing process of structuring, rhetoric is used to habituate people and make them acquiesce to a “man-made” world. Yet, by going against the grain of these etymologies in the search for hidden historical truths, the contingent meaning of lived historical experience can be restored, thereby pressuring continual social re-assessment. Vico’s theory is also enriched by Levi-Strauss’ (1979) notion of myth, which is a type of cultural thought, conceived in binary oppositions where the oppositions are arranged and combined to produce cultural productions that are used to resolve universal and cultural contradictions. Herzfeld uses Vico’s ideas to analyse how etymology is used by the nation- state to further its political and ideological interests. He also dislodges Levi-Strauss’ theory from its ahistorical context to explicate the binary oppositions produced by these etymological claims. In this thesis, I adapt Herzfeld’s modified concepts to unravel the etymological representations of celibacy that are used by the papacy to construct a morality, the latter being a feature of ideological construction. I then analyse how priests with friends, in recognizing universal and cultural contradictions, rhetorically both deconstruct the moral images promulgated by the papacy and create new images to accommodate their relationships. This agency results in disjunctions within the priesthood and Church, which produce social dissonance.

Another feature of ideology is that of identity construction, which again contributes to the positioning of an individual in social order. These images of the essential self can be analysed by using the ideas of the American philosopher, C.S. Peirce. Peirce proposed a theory of meaning through a complex classification of signs in which different relationships between the signifier and signified form the basis of semiotic structures. Included in these sets of relationships are the “triadic relations of performance” in which the icon is featured. “[Within] the *icon*, the relationship between sign and object, or “signifier and signified, manifests ... a similarity or ‘fitness’ of resemblance proposed by the sign, to be acknowledged by its receiver” [original emphasis] (Hawkes 1977, pp. 128-29). Herzfeld gives dynamism to this static notion of icon by situating this relation within the performances of social actors, a social process that he refers to as iconicity. By using iconicity, social actors construct rhetoric to establish persuasive resemblances between the signifier and signified that convey a natural look in which meaning is derived from resemblance

(Herzfeld 1997, pp. 56-57). In this work, I use the idea of iconicity to show how the papacy and priests with friends respectively construct identity in which celibacy and sexual intimacy are correspondingly appropriated. In this process, the papacy makes a claim that celibacy has a meaningful resemblance to priesthood, whilst priests with friends contend that sexual intimacy can also make such a resemblance.

I also use the concept of the natural in conjunction with iconicity, which has theoretical origins in (Douglas 1973 (1970)). According to Douglas, every culture naturalises a certain view of the human body to make it carry social meanings, and this naturalisation is socially accepted when it is idealised, practised, ritualised, institutionalised and socialised. However, like Herzfeld, my concern is not with causality; rather, I am interested in how social actors use processes of naturalization, such as iconicity, to reify their contingent claims as moral standards. In my thesis, I adapt the concept of the natural to the corresponding social purposes of the papacy and priests with friends. The papacy, for instance, argues celibacy is a supernatural symbol that transcends the natural symbol of sexuality, and therefore concludes that celibacy should be a moral standard for priests. Priests with friends, however, argue that celibacy is unnatural for them and many of their confreres, and that sexual intimacy has a holistic quality that embodies both the natural and the supernatural, which these priests regard as a moral condition.

Ideology is also maintained through stereotypes, and in this study, the analysis of these oversimplified standards is assisted by Bourdieu's (1977) account of practice. Accordingly, social action is the social structure, continuously shaped by the consequences of human actions, but because of the existence of the habitus, social actors are constrained. The habitus is a deep structural system that has classificatory tendencies, is socially acquired, and is manifested in attitudes, opinions, and bodily expressions. These practices tend to naturalize arbitrariness through stereotypical classifications, and therefore have the propensity to put limits on negotiations by social actors. This notion is used by Herzfeld to analyse the way in which social actors use rhetoric to create and recreate social structure and normative social patterns. Herzfeld also shows how we can expand this approach by using ideas developed by Ardener and Austin. Ardener (1971, p. 224) explicates how social actors can dislocate etymologies from ideologies and deploy them for their own

purposes, while Austin's (1975) analysis of words, distinguishes between what we say, what we mean when we say it, and what we accomplish by saying it. Social actors can, therefore, negotiate stereotypes to either maintain social normativity or create exceptions that are incrementally incorporated into everyday social repertoires. Concomitantly, stereotypes are used by the state to maintain social order; yet, while the state may remain resistant to change it is not impervious. In this study, I modify these ideas in my examination of how formal images are made socially operative in stereotypes, which reduces social actors to oversimplified standards. I then show how priests with friends counter these stereotypical classifications with a rhetoric of resistance. This approach is extended in an examination of how priests with friends endeavour to negotiate stereotypes through a rhetoric of radical change in order to publicly present their friendships as a part of their everyday lives. Yet, these priests recognize limits to their inventions, for the stereotype is embedded in normativity that constrains their conduct in social relations. This last approach, however, is in contradistinction to Herzfeld's choice of examining bureaucratic resistance to local challenge. I instead examine the resistances of priests with friends to the papacy, which is consistent with the thrust of this research.

These key concepts are important for understanding the overall design and theoretical focus of this thesis. The various progenitors of these ideas, Herzfeld's contingent animation of these theories, and my own manifold applications, each successively build on a grand theoretical scheme that places meaning at its core. Some of the originators, such as Peirce, Evans-Pritchard, Levi-Strauss and Douglas, tended to assign their concepts with an overly static perspective of meaning. Herzfeld, however, has vivified and adapted concepts, situating them in a theory of meaning that is framed by a social poetics approach. In this approach, forms of rhetoric are the expressions of meaning that continuously construct the constitution of social relations. In my thesis, I apply and extend these analytical tools to unpack the contingent and complex rhetorics of both the papacy and priests with friends, who respectively attribute different meanings to celibacy and sexual intimacy. More specifically, these concepts have assisted me in the identification of different forms of rhetoric, which emphasise the various ways in which meaning is constructed and negotiated within the celibacy debate. As well, these ideas have provided analytical

foundations for recognizing contradictions that can produce disjunctions, in which I endeavour to explain why there exist divergences in meaning. The theoretical architecture of this thesis is, therefore, styled in a way that gives further clarification to how meanings are constructed through the various claims of social actors.

The Research Process

The purpose of this research has been to conduct a study of the discourses of both the papacy and priests with friends. In giving the rhetoric of each categorical group equal treatment, I hoped to rearrange the discordant data to an analytical consonance. In 1995, four years prior to the commencement of my Ph.D. candidacy, and equipped with some awareness of the issues relating to celibacy,¹⁷ I prepared myself to knock at the door of the priestly fortress. With the help and guidance of priests known to me, I wrote an invitation to priests with friends to respond to my research initiative, which was submitted to an Australian priest journal, an excerpt of which follows,

I invite priests who have “particular friendships”¹⁸ to participate in a study that looks at how those friendships (past or present, celibate or sexual) have affected priestly ministry, personal well-being, and relationship with God (Anderson 1995) [see Appendix 1].

The editor took the risk of publishing the article, and supported it with two other articles that promoted the importance of intimacy in the lives of priests. In the meantime, I prepared a list of thirty questions [see Appendix 2], again with the advice and help of a priest, and circulated this to diocesan councils of priests in the hope of encouraging more priests to contribute detailed information about their friendships and the impact these relationships have on their lives and ministries.

Submissions from both these avenues of promotion were initially received from twenty-six priest respondents, with later re-advertisement in the priests’ journal

¹⁷ During my undergraduate years, I was able to study the issue of celibacy through various theoretical perspectives. These included: a sociological critique of celibacy through a theory of deviance; an exegetical consideration of 1 Corinthians 7 in relation to celibacy; an historical study of celibacy; an application of Kleinian psychoanalytical theory to the problems of reparation in the priesthood; a Jungian study of the effects of celibacy on individual priests; a study of burnout in the priesthood and a study of clerical sexual abuse. My honours dissertation used an anthropology of experience to examine celibacy.

¹⁸ See the section “The Dilemmas of Language” in this chapter, for an explanation of the use of the term “particular friendships.”

yielding some further responses. A few priest respondents had no sexually intimate friendships; some priests had *one true love*, while some others had previous sexual relationships prior to making a commitment to their friend. These friendships extended from several years to ten and twenty years, and in one case, forty years. Priests who were respectively heterosexual or homosexual responded, with one priest tentatively declaring himself bisexual. Those priests who answered can also be categorized as either secular or religious priests. While it is acknowledged that there are differences in related claims on celibacy, namely, secular priests make a promise of celibacy and religious priests take a vow of chastity,¹⁹ these priests made it obvious that the issue of celibacy affects all Catholic priests. This view is further reflected in roughly similar numbers of priests who contributed from each of these priestly categories. In addition, priests who contributed to this research were predominantly drawn from the Australian context. However, some priests have migrated from other countries and, consequently, events that they have recounted may have occurred in different geographical locations.

About a third of these priests responded anonymously, while others disclosed their identity. Some of these latter priests have also been willing to engage in prolonged communication, either by written correspondence or telephone. Several of these priests have maintained intermittent contact over these past eight years, whilst a few have sustained weekly contact throughout the duration of this research. Some other priests later participated in the study, generally after having met me through informal avenues. However, only a small number of priests responded to the questionnaire, an option fraught with difficulties because a priest would have had to declare his interest in the research if he were to obtain a copy of the questionnaire. Yet, these latter responses provided in-depth information, which significantly guided my investigations. Several priests also encouraged confreres to respond to this research, but this proved an ineffective way of promoting the study. One priest stated, *I have gently encouraged a few guys to write submissions but with little success. Most just*

¹⁹ In general terms, secular priests belong to a local diocese, and are under the direct authority of the bishop of that diocese. These priests usually live alone, or with one or two other priests in presbyteries. Church law requires them that they make a promise to be celibate. Priests who belong to religious or monastic orders take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and live in religious houses. These orders are usually independent of local bishops but this latter group of priests frequently work under a diocesan bishop.

seem too snowed under with work, and the day-to-day stress of modern ministry. Fear may also have been another reason for not responding to their confrere's encouragement, a problem that will be discussed later in this chapter. In total, over forty priests ended up contributing to this research; several of which, after having contributed their story, eventually left the priesthood. These priests used this research to work through their personal and priestly dilemmas. As well, ten priests who had previously left the priesthood also contributed their stories, and a small amount of this material has been used in this thesis where appropriate.

Long-term association with five priest respondents eventually yielded some limited opportunities for participant observation, where on several occasions I was able to observe priests in public, either alone or with their friends. These occasions helped me appreciate the difficulties these priests encounter in their everyday lives, for there are no avenues of recourse when the pain of celibacy is too much, nor mercy from gossipers and critics who seek to destroy the reputations of priests and their valued friendships.

Another significant ethnographic opportunity became available when I was employed as the Diocesan Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies for nearly two years. Although at least two of the three interviewers for the position knew of my research, it was never mentioned during my interview, nor rarely discussed thereafter. Yet ironically, such employment provided favourable conditions for observing the everyday workings of Church administration, Catholic sexual organization, and culturally intimate structural procedures. Ready access to the priest population, often on a daily basis, contributed further to my immersion into the Church culture, leaving me sometimes wondering whether I had become "the anthropology," such was the depth of reflection given to the research during this period. Nonetheless, a small number of priests and other influential people who knew about my research and were either privately reticent or publicly hostile to my investigations made life difficult. Added to this was the daily reminder of gender discrimination. The constant requirement to defer to male celibate leadership and decision-making, regardless of any experience or expertise I possessed, was at times, frustrating and humiliating. Added to this grief was my experience of the exclusive liturgical language and practice of daily communal prayer and Eucharist, which left

me feeling as though the hierarchical Church had written my gender out of existence. Initially, I coped with these difficulties by adopting a pose that I call “social schizophrenia.” In this state, I maintained the public face of the Diocesan Director and uncritically promoted the works of the Church. In private, I pursued my research, which nurtured and nourished my desire for Church reform. Maintaining this spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually divided state, however, eventually took its toll on my health and well-being, which in turn curtailed my studies for several months. I then resigned from my job, won a scholarship for fifteen months that funded for the most part the conclusion of this research, and was able to concentrate with single-mindedness on the task in hand.

Interviews with Priests

My long-term interest in issues pertaining to sexuality, and specifically, celibacy, and my familiarity with the Catholic culture provided a valuable foundation to this research. This basis also provided me with a language with which I could converse with priests, for Catholic parlance is idiomatic, peppered with arcane expressions and theological concepts. These advantages, along with the advice of priests, helped me to devise five basic questions, which I inserted in the original advertisement for the research (see Appendix 1). I then formulated a more complex set of questions that I hoped would maximise the amount of information I could gather. These prescriptive questions served as the initial ethnographic technique for gathering information; their design pressured by the uncertainty of how much detail would be forthcoming, and whether I would have subsequent opportunities to further question priests. Taking into account cultural tensions and sanctions and the personal nature of this research, I also offered a variety of avenues, which included interviews (by telephone or in person), free-style written submissions, response to a prepared questionnaire, or combinations of these. In presenting these options, I hoped to accommodate the preferences of priests, facilitate ease of reply, and provide sufficient flexibility that would minimise difficulties in responding to this research. Indeed, priests chose particular communication methods that were expedient, personally comfortable, cost effective, and for some, ensured anonymity.

Fear was palpable in the written submissions and interviews of a significant numbers of priests with friends. These priests are anxious about reprisals if their identities

became known to powerful critics, particularly, Catholics who have *an ear in Rome* and would report priests who were suspected of sexual transgressions, groups and individuals who consider all sexual relationships with priests are abusive, and conservative priests. Fr. John makes it clear what is at stake if his friendship is exposed:

It seems clear in this Archdiocese that any priest who publicly announced that he had an intimate relationship with a woman, would be immediately suspended. The Archbishop made that clear in an interview with a priest friend who was thinking of resigning from the ministry. To speak out would mean priestly suicide!

Another priest similarly expressed his fears: *Sorry about the anonymity, but we are a bit spooked by this. Paranoia is OK if you really do have enemies.* Making sure I was not an enemy too, was a concern that had to be addressed by a few priests before responding to this research. In effect, those priests who chose to engage in this research risked their status, reputations, livelihood and ministry. Significant effort on both the priests' and my own part was given to alleviating this fear. One priest was concerned that his written submission might not arrive at my post-box (perhaps in fear that it might be received by the "wrong hands") and asked if I would return an enclosed self-addressed, stamped postcard worded with a message of "safe arrival," which, of course, I did. Other priests asked me to destroy their correspondence after I had made transcripts, a request that I complied with. Two priests also warned me that various individuals and groups might try to dissuade me: *conservatives will not want their illusion shattered.* Such fears were duly acknowledged, and I subsequently deleted all social, geographical and nominal information from transcripts, locked evidence in a filing cabinet, organized security features on computer stored evidence, and with the exception of ongoing contacts, destroyed all records of priests' names and addresses. In contrast, several priests asked that their identities be disclosed in this thesis; however, given official sanctions, I have not deferred to their requests. In consequence, priests who have submitted anecdotal evidence to this research that has not been published remain anonymous.

Over the eight years of doing this research, only five priests who were homosexual contributed to this research. While, I made specific efforts to contact this categorical

group, especially in these past two years, I had little success. Fr. John indicated that *there's basically a witch-hunt and perhaps that's why these priests have closed their ranks*. Fr. Peter confirmed this latter observation, saying that this witch-hunt had arisen in part out of the crisis of clergy sexual abuse of minors, which resulted in the unjust scapegoating of homosexual priests. Fr. Mark, however, added another perspective when he stated, *priests who are [homosexual and] willing to share with you their [stories] ... are doubly heroic since, in attempting to come to terms with their God-given sexuality, they are starting with a massive handicap in the prevailing ethos of the Catholic Church*. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the climate of homophobia and subsequent persecution within the Church has been significantly instrumental in inhibiting homosexual priests from responding to this research.

A small number of priests made enquiries about the research and choose not to continue for reasons that were not revealed to me, and nor did I pursue or encourage them to reconsider. Voluntary contribution is an ethic of ethnography that respects self-determination, an important principle particularly in this research because priests are denied sexual autonomy in the priesthood. For those priests who did telephone, I asked them if I could record interviews on my tape recorder. In most cases, permission was granted; although some needed the assurance that their testimony would be erased after the transcript was made, which it has been. In several instances where permission was not given, notes were taken but these priests were generally not very forthcoming with information. During these interviews, I exercised reflexivity, which enabled me to combine the priests' understandings of their situation with reflections of my own understanding of their situation in order to comprehend the complexity of their lives and ministries. This approach to gathering evidence both enriched the ethnographic enterprise and served as a means for recognising and interpreting the culturally intimate strategies of priests.

Initial questions used in interviews were similar to those set out in the aforementioned questionnaire, and began with queries about their family, schooling, and why they became a priest. This nostalgic distance set them relatively at ease, with these priests then moving into the personal areas of celibacy and sexual intimacy on their own volition. Several priests initially spoke in the third person, changing to the first person only after they had gained sufficient confidence to speak

openly about themselves. A number of priests had difficulty in expanding on aspects of their sexuality due to their limited sexual and emotional vocabulary. Indeed, these priests had never or rarely talked about their lives in such intimate detail. This situation was aptly illustrated by the comment of Fr. Ben: *For thirty years, we have been playing golf together, but not once have we talked about our celibacy and its difficulties.* For some priests, these interviews elicited feelings of vulnerability, which required from me, an ethical awareness that demanded I put their humanity before my research. On two occasions, I switched off the tape recorder and sat quietly, waiting for the tears to subside. Similarly, I listened to outpourings of bitterness and anger over lost opportunities. I also suggested, during two interviews, that those particular priests should seek professional care to resolve their difficulties.

At times, these interviews yielded information that was very difficult for me to deal with personally. One priest, for example, told me how he had tried to tame his sexuality by castrating himself in his seminary days. After relaying my anguish over this mutilation to a priest acquaintance, he responded by saying such a *solution* was not unheard of and added that, others used their pyjama strings for the same reason. This response did not alleviate my distress! Yet, those priests that maintained regular contact not only provided me with their stories through open and extended interviews; they also offered necessary pastoral care that allowed me to appropriately discharge my own fears, concerns, and frustrations. There was also another side to the suffering. Some of these priests also disclosed excerpts from their lives that I regard as some of the best homilies I have ever heard. In conducting this ethnography, for every valley of pain I entered, there were similar treks to mountains of joy, which laid out for me a panorama of wonder, happiness, and love.

Research Principles and Ethics

Appropriate research principles are important for effectively studying vast collectives such as the priesthood for without them such studies would be overwhelmed by the enormity of cultural complexities and political pressures. Therefore, in this research, I have situated myself in the middle ground so that equal consideration and fair representation is given to the papacy and priests with friends, a position that favours neither official nor social rhetoric. Yet, this intermediate position also has moral implications. Consequently, I acknowledge the inequitable distribution of social,

religious, and political resources that marginalize priests with friends, for these priests struggle with scant means to have their voices heard. As an anthropologist, I have a modest role in unravelling the factors that create, conceal, and perpetuate these inequalities in the priesthood. This moral obligation, however, requires ethnographic exposure of religious and social relationships and necessitates the uncovering of survival tactics used by these priests. Such exposure risks attack by those in the Church who have powerful interests in maintaining celibacy. This threat, however, is foiled by giving a penetrating critique into the strategies of the well-resourced papacy and its representatives, rendering the latter accountable for its discriminatory religious, social, and political performances.

While this research principle has demanded intense ethnographic reflection, which has resulted in taking particular stances on aspects of this study, sustaining this middle ground has not been an easy task for me as an anthropologist because of my own marginalised situation within the Church. Yet, in the interests of seeking understanding, but without suspending comment on abuses of power, this principle has helped me to develop awareness that many good-hearted people constitute the Church, but hold different social opinions. This has required me to listen with an ear that neither dismisses the espoused charity of some groups nor the goodwill of those in favoured positions. Consequently, all positions are challenged in this research, including my own, but in a way that extends courtesy and respect for the papacy and those priests who have responded to this study. This research principle is an ethical principal, which brings to me as the researcher, the ability to grasp multiple points of view that enrich perception and knowledge, and elucidate moral concerns. Such an attitude has the potential to create bridges of dialogue that may not have otherwise existed.

Respect and courtesy, however, have not always been reciprocated in my anthropological endeavours to ethically engage in this research. By entering an elite and exclusive male domain, I encountered a multitude of reactions and responses, some of which threatened and hampered this research, while others in contrast, encouraged and informed it. Bishops and priests have a higher status in the Church than myself as a layperson and woman, nor did my profession as an anthropologist intimidate them. From their lofty position, these elites have the power to jeopardize,

indeed, veto this research, an option that some priests endeavoured to exercise. One bishop chastised me for having *entered the realm of the confessional*, inferring that my research was sacrilegious. Another bishop charged my anthropological approach to this issue with *blasphemy*, implying that truthfulness cannot be communicated outside of official Church scholarship. Other priests derided me for my presumed *academic ambition* and *ideologically driven opportunism*. Several priests also dismissed this research's concerns as being inessential: *I doubt that any amount of facts/data and research will sway the Vatican in this matter*. Such comments as these, using the weight of the papacy's power, tend to belittle the research.

Discrimination against my gender has also been used to inhibit and discredit this research. On one occasion, I needed to examine archival material at a monastery's library. However, as a woman, I was not allowed to enter the restricted male enclosure, although paradoxically, a woman who had worked her way into the position of secretary acted as a gatekeeper, and surreptitiously helped me access required texts. The trespass of hallowed space has also been communicated by remarks such as: *She couldn't possibly understand the relationship a priest has with the altar*. As well, female stereotypes have been used to denigrate me, thereby diminishing the validity of this study: *She wants to be a priest; she must be having an affair with a priest; you're a blacktracker*.²⁰ In addition, one bishop and priests made anti-feminist jibes: *You're one of 'them' [a feminist]; you're a pain; I can imagine what sort of outcomes your research will have*. Such disparaging remarks and other reductive comments, however, can be understood as an exercise of power aimed at interrupting, constraining, discrediting and ignoring this research.

Nevertheless, from the outset of this research, I recognized that some individual priests would consider that ethnographical exposure could contribute to their reformist goals. This has obviously been the case. Yet, my admission into the priestly realm has often been conditional, with a number of priests asking: *Why are you doing this?* Several other priests expressed their circumspection by querying: *What is your situation in the Church?* My response, "I'm a practising Catholic,"

²⁰ "Blacktracker" is a negative term that is applied to a woman who is deemed to be "chasing" after a priest.

proved the correct password for securing access to their culturally intimate reports of celibacy and sexual intimacy. According to another priest respondent, my former local bishop has also been questioned by the national bishops' conference. He apparently replied that I am in *good standing in the Diocese*; a positive response that undoubtedly allayed some doubts and concerns. Other priests, however, welcomed this research: *Thanks for your courage to open up Canon 277; Bon[ne] chance!, and, we'll pray for you; all the best with your study, may it open windows and doors and allow the light and breath of the Spirit to be heard and dwell ever more deeper.* Some priests have also assumed my femaleness into this research: *it's easier to talk to a woman, she is asking us to consider this subject from a woman's point of view.* A number of priests have also sought my advice *as a woman* to help them negotiate their heterosexual friendships. In addition, these comments have indicated that entry into the intimate domain of priests has been largely dependent on the absence of other avenues for presenting their case for reform. In the meantime, some priests have taken advantage of this research: they have viewed it as a desirable platform on which to express their opinions and views; considered the research's goals could contribute to the reform of celibacy; have been further assured by my Catholic ethos; and have deemed me trustworthy. Readings I hope and pray I live up to!

Documentary Sources

During my fieldwork, I attempted to interview representatives of the papacy, namely, bishops, who are principally responsible for the governance of the Church. Several bishops and a provincial were willing to speak to me about this matter, but these clerics privately advocated the reform of celibacy! (Their comment has been included in this thesis, but with the exception where their position in the hierarchy is relevant, they have been code-named as priests to protect their identities.) Priests are also clerics in their own right, and some have contributed comment from the bureaucratic perspective that has proven useful. Yet, opportunities for engaging in intense discussions with the local representatives of the papacy who uphold celibacy have been extremely limited. After all, it would not be in the interests of these clerics to expose cultural intimacy to an outsider, or to defer to the questions and opinions of a person ranked lower in the Church than they. Therefore, I have looked elsewhere for ethnographic evidence that represents the papacy's position on celibacy. These sources include: official Church documents and commentaries that

support these texts; quotes from episcopal bureaucrats that have been relayed by priest respondents, and those recorded by journalists.

Given that this research has been undertaken in a complicated social area in which sources of evidence also become complex, I have additionally used secondary sources to add substance and detail to this research. This material has been garnered from a range of writings, including publications produced by categorical groups of priests, various Church reform movements, and researchers that represent a multiplicity of academic disciplines. The role of their literatures in this research has been important for teasing out the complicated and multifaceted issues relating to celibacy and sexual intimacy. They have contributed to: the methodical deconstruction of political argument and ensuing negotiations; contemporary exegesis of scripture, history and tradition; analysis of groups and individuals' investments in celibacy.

Approach to Analysis

Of specific interest to this research is the particularity of each case, where each priest uses a different combination of strategies apposite to his local situation. The emphasis is not on quantification, but rather on listening to how these particular priests understand their situation within the priesthood. For this reason, analytical preference is given to maintaining the integrity of each priest's story. Such an approach has been assisted by the assignment of a coded reference, which I continued to use in each draft of the thesis, omitting that reference in the final draft. This information system helped preserve the uniqueness of each contribution to the research, and ensured that any distortion of value or significance that might occur during writing was minimised. Furthermore, in the limited number of cases where I have been concerned that a reader could determine a priest's identity, I have combined one priest's contribution with another, thereby creating a composite priestly character. As well, I have given these priests and their friends pseudonyms, names that I have randomly drawn from the bible and at times, contemporized, for example, James on some occasions is referred to as Jim. The purpose of assigning names to these people is to vivify and personalise these priests and their friends, for they are not distant, anonymous characters but men and women who participate in the ordinary everyday life of the Church. However, any name that appears to

correlate with a particular priest or a priest's friend must be considered purely coincidental. Moreover, I request that readers respect the anonymity of the priests and their friends.

With regards to the reliability of evidence provided by priest respondents, emphasis has been given to the process of rhetorical constructedness rather than the verity of the narrative. Nonetheless, there has been no indication during fieldwork that priests were being untruthful or that they were exaggerating their stories; rather, priest respondents conveyed their understandings of their lives and ministries. In addition, while original questions used in interviews were prescriptive, as compared to later interviews that were extended and open-ended, priests were free to dictate responses. Priests, used to the pulpit, know how to be listened to and expected no less from me as an anthropologist. The stories of priests are not simply responses coloured by specific questions or attitudes of the researcher, they are responses given to me, along with the responsibility, to create an appropriate medium in which they can be heard.

Dilemmas with Language

Language acts as a vehicle of social construction that shapes the lives of people and its social expression is a part of the theoretical commitment of this study. Furthermore, language is embedded with power relations and consequently, it is in the interests of the papacy to control what can be said and what cannot, for without such restraint language can be used to signal social and structural change. So, when making initial contact with priests through the advertisement in the priests' journal, I endeavoured to take into account the priesthood's sensitivity to any exposure of sexual activity within its midst. I attempted to phrase the invitation to the research with the suggestive term, "particular friendship." This term was used in seminaries up until the late 1960s to convey a warning about sexual relationships,

... the very vagueness of the expression and its lack of definition made it serviceable for generations that were concerned about the possibility of sexual element in friendship. The phrase could be used in speaking to young people in order to imply this possibility without ever being specific. Such a warning never made quite clear the exact 'danger' (McGuire 1988, p. 421)

This term, however, was not without problems. A few priest respondents considered that “particular friendship” related only to homosexual friendships; some believed it implied heterosexual relationship and used it to describe their “special” friendship; others agreed that it simply meant having any intimate companionship; whilst others felt uncomfortable with the idea of applying such a phrase to their friendships because of the associated negative connotations. I subsequently recognized that these priests do not possess a common term for these friendships. It also became evident that they also struggle to find a language that can best describe their relationships; even to suggest that the friendship is sexual is problematic as is examined in chapter four.

Another consequence of this struggle with language is that each priest is left to develop a “secret” language about his friendship, and because he cannot spell out his relationship publicly, he may have some difficulty in identifying his friendship in ways he might like to. This has also created difficulties for referring to these friendships within the thesis. A significant proportion of these priests, however, use the ambiguous term “friend” to describe their relationship and when I refer to them in this thesis, I use words such as “priest with friend,” “friend,” or “friendship.” Priests with friends have a need to separate their interests from the papacy’s interests, and subsequently, they look for new words that subtly redefine their relationships and themselves. This search also includes a priest’s need to develop an appropriate language about sexuality. Often priests described their close personal relationship as “intimate,” which, as an extension of that closeness, they guardedly indicated they were sexually intimate with their friends in various ways. Thus, when I refer to the sexual component of these friendships, I use the interchangeable terms, intimacy and sexual intimacy, unless otherwise specified. The papacy, on the other hand, has a different understanding of sexual intimacy from these priests. It identifies morality not with the quality of relational closeness, but primarily with the regulation of the sex act. Hence, when I talk about sexuality in relation to the papacy, I talk about sexual activity. It must be remembered though that these definitions are surrounded by cultural haziness and should be read as such.

In contemporary academic research, gender inclusive language is an ethical standard that should be observed by all researchers. However, the papacy does not recognize

the importance of inclusive language or the justice issues relating to its use. This attitude is exemplified by the papacy's use of exclusive language in all official documentation; for example, "man," "mankind," and "brother," are used to respectively refer to "man and woman," "humankind," and "brother and sister." Yet, the papacy's use of this word is not consistent. For instance, only a "man" can become an ordained priest. Consequently, in this thesis, I have chosen to maintain the use of exclusive language to ethnographically highlight this characteristic of the priesthood because it plays a part in maintaining the sexual organization of the Church, which includes celibacy.

Conclusion

This chapter reviews key issues that frame this research. The literature review examines relevant works that inform this study, whilst indicating that my research presents a unique contribution to both anthropology and the Church's understanding of celibacy and sexual intimacy. In anthropology, minimal research has focused on imposed celibacy and its social implications and this study seeks to address that gap. Similarly, there is a pressing need to examine celibacy's place in the sexual organization of the Church. Changing sexual patterns, particularly in Western societies, are having an impact on Catholic beliefs, values and practices, which, in consequence, is reshaping the priesthood. Yet, there is much less of a change in the papacy, the teaching office and administrative arm of the Church. Thus, the presentation of insights into the theoretical perspective chosen, the research methods utilised, and some of the obstacles encountered, assist in the analysis of the consequent social dissonance. Understanding the dynamics of religious, social and political discord will greatly enhance both the anthropological and theological study of celibacy and sexual intimacy. It is also hoped that this work will in some small way contribute to the processes of resolution and reconciliation between Catholics and, in particular, between the papacy and priests with friends.

CHAPTER TWO

The Dilemma of Disjunctions

According to the papacy, “the priest is a priest at the altar; he is a priest in the confessional; he is a priest in the school; he is priest on the street; indeed, he is a priest everywhere” (Ternyak 2002, n. 11).²¹ The papacy has defined this total identity for a priest in which public expectations and private experiences are considered the same. Such an essentialized character is understood by the papacy to be absolutely necessary for the Catholic belief system and the hierarchical order in which the priest is required to faithfully and dutifully administer the sacraments, preach, and minister to the needs of Catholics. Priests with friends, however, contend that such institutional expectations produce experienced contradictions that can result in a lack of wholeness and well-being that undermines their lives and ministry. Consequently, these priests attempt to resist the total identity by contracting friendships that they argue can assuage their difficulties, but such actions create a disjunction between themselves and the papacy.

My intention in this chapter is to show the necessary difference between the logical purity of the total identity as established by the papacy and an identity sensitive to the interactions of priests in their everyday lives. I demonstrate how this dispute occurs, and then comes to the fore in a culture’s controlling mechanisms. The papacy, on the one hand, strives to make certain priests uphold the total identity by requiring them to make a promise or vow of celibacy and obliging them to submit to the Sacrament of Penance. Priests with friends, on the other hand, discern contradictions between institutional expectations and their experiences and seek to negotiate these controlling mechanisms to advantage their lives and ministry. These priests therefore use a rhetoric of resistance to review their original commitment to celibacy and renegotiate their participation in the ritual that they subsequently appropriate as the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I then show why formal dialogue is one important avenue for reconciling differences between the total identity as prescribed by the papacy and the negotiated identity as constructed by priests with

²¹ When references are taken from Vatican documents that are accessed via the Internet, the numbered section, that is, “n.”, is also quoted.

friends, for without which there is an increase in social tension. In dealing with a complex world, the given total identity as prescribed by a dominant social group is shown to be incapable of halting the contingency of lived experiences of subalterns from escaping the containment given in an ideal.

The Total Identity of a Priest

The papacy explicitly defines a priest's total identity by its rhetoric of celibacy: "[Priests] more readily cling to [Christ] with undivided heart and dedicate themselves more freely in him and through him to the service of God and men" (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). The papacy considers that the loving of a human being competes against the loving of God and therefore a priest must prioritise his dedication and service to God alone. This demand for undivided and unrestricted devotion is also pressured by parishioners who expect that their priests should ideally be on call twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week, sustained by minimal financial remuneration, and take responsibility for their total person, body, mind and spirit from baptism until death. Yet, the expectations and demands of neither the papacy nor parishioners take into serious consideration the human limitations and the personal needs of a priest.

The papacy and parishioners, in assuming an *a priori* meaning of celibacy, expect a priest will negotiate his celibacy regardless of the circumstances in which he finds himself. Confident in this presumption, the papacy is able to definitively state: "In the world today, many people call perfect continence impossible. The more they do so, the more humbly and perseveringly priests should join with the Church in praying for the grace of fidelity. It is never denied to those who ask" (John Paul II 1992, p. 57). By reifying a supernatural reading of celibacy and ignoring contesting interpretations of its practice, the papacy puts the onus on each and every priest to remain faithful to celibacy. Garnered with the assurance that priests are praying for the grace to live celibacy, that those prayers will be answered, and that God wills this practice for priests, the papacy remains confident in the veracity of celibacy. This belief enables the papacy to establish a homogeneous definition that socially and sexually differentiates priests from the rest of humanity: priests are therefore deemed

superhuman. Indeed, they are considered the *alter Christus*,²² priests who are able to live and minister beyond human capability: a phenomenal notion bolstered by celibacy, which profits the papacy and those parishioners who desire ongoing security for their belief system and their investments in orthodoxy.

This religious promotion of celibacy also produces instrumental outcomes that protect both the papacy and conservative Catholics' purposes and investments. In the Church, priests are required to make descendent transactions with the rest of mankind. In this commerce, they engage in social exchange by providing spiritual favours and religious wares in return for goods, obligations and services that are used to build and strengthen the belief system of the papacy and the wealth of the Church. To maintain the benefits of this exchange, priests are required to uphold a hierarchical form of reciprocal relations, ensuring that religious security, received wealth and political power stay in the hands of the papacy. Moreover, these investments are further secured by celibacy: *Celibacy the control factor par excellence: Bachelors are, quite simply, easier to manage. There is no family to care for or to pay for; there is no wife to counsel disobedience or to stiffen resolve; there is no danger of nepotism or of children inheriting Church property* (Rice 1991, p. 182).²³

It is in the papacy's interests to categorically insist that celibacy is possible, particularly if priests adopt prescribed safeguards to protect their practice. According to the papacy, priests can overcome any difficulties in living celibacy if they

make use of all the supernatural and natural helps which are now available to all. Once again it is prayer, together with the Church's sacraments and ascetical practice, which will provide hope in difficulties, forgiveness in failings, and confident and courage in resuming the journey" (John Paul II 1992, p. 57).

The papacy is confident that supernatural and natural aids are sufficient, that priests are willing and able to live a life of perpetual self-denial, and that the Sacrament of

²² Latin for "another Christ."

²³ The importance of celibacy for maintaining the Church's wealth will be further examined in chapter five.

Penance will restore God's design for hierarchical order in the case of a priest's "failing." Thus, the papacy can dismiss the cultural complexities, contingent circumstances and personal character that affect the ability of priests to practise celibacy. Nonetheless, priest respondents challenge these definitive claims, and assert that celibacy can produce a lack of wholeness and well-being in their lives and ministry.

The Lack of Wholeness and Well-being of a Priest

The majority of priests I interviewed gave significant testimony to the negative consequences of celibacy for them and their confreres. According to these priests, celibacy can manifest difficulties that range from personal and social problems to different sorts of illnesses, including sexual disorders. Several priests base their claims on observation and listening, including Fr. Peter who maintains that he has *seen so many friends suffer needlessly and so many vocations stuffed-up or never even started because of this bloody crazy law*. Fr. Joe also asserts his belief that celibacy *accentuates any proclivity or weakness to illness*, and then went on to cite cases of *mental illness* in the priesthood: *some of these guys should never have been priests; it's not a question of morals, but the question of personality, and also total immaturity*. Fr. John took the views of his confreres one step further: *The more I think about it the more I realize just how dramatic have been the effects of this compulsory law on individuals' lives and the very life of the Church, which has been drastically wounded and weakened*. Celibacy, according to Fr. John, not only wounds particular priests, it is also causes injury to the Church itself.

Some researchers also raise similar concerns about the maturity of priests. The U.S. National Conference of Bishops, for example, commissioned Kennedy and Heckler to conduct research on the psychological development of priests, and the results indicated 66.05% of the priests in the USA to be psychologically underdeveloped and 8.48% maldeveloped (1972, pp. 51-52).²⁴ According to these researchers, "Underdeveloped priests are genuinely uneasy about intimacy" and those "[priests who have] not solved the problem of intimacy [have] not reached maturity either" (p.

²⁴ 7.01% of priests were emotionally developed, while 18.54% were developing (Kennedy and Heckler 1972, pp. 51-52).

10). Kennedy and Heckler further state, “[Priests] who are immature may not need medical or psychological treatment as much as they need a broader and richer experience of life itself,” which brings into question the requirement for celibacy (p 8). Such research suggests that celibacy limits the possibility of engaging in relationships that help priests mature as human beings. Nonetheless, when these reports were subsequently delivered to the Bishops’ Conference, they were politely received but no follow up action was initiated (Kennedy 2002).

The problem of immaturity is not confined to the United States. An Australian profile of the priesthood conducted in 1990 also reports that priests often have “unrewarding relationships and uneasiness about intimacy, with resulting difficulties with one’s personal identity, non-integrated psychosexual identity; and lack of self confidence” (McKinnon 1990, p. 38). The report concludes “Sadly, ..., only about one in ten (9%) of the priests in the sample have comfortably and consistently reached a high level of human maturity where they each think for themselves and take note of their feelings” (McKinnon 1990, p. 11).²⁵ The majority of these priests have difficulty in valuing and establishing a personal identity, which is primarily reflected through intimate relationships. Yet, the restraint of celibacy disallows the freedom to venture into these necessary relationships, resulting in poorly developed priests. These priests may be adequate in their ministerial function, but “they could be far more effective personally and professionally if they were helped to achieve greater human and religious maturity” (Kennedy and Heckler 1972, p. 16). However, when priests do endeavour to establish a personal identity, they do so under considerable religious and social pressure not to undertake this move. Hence, there are two indicators that the papacy’s definition of a total identity for priests is being maintained at a serious cost. These indicators are based on the assessment of the negative effects of celibacy by priests themselves, and on the conclusion of researchers.

²⁵ Baars and Terruwe concluded from their studies of all priests in Western Europe and North America, “60%-70% suffer from a degree of emotional immaturity which does not prevent them from exercising their priestly function, but precludes their being happy men and effective priests whose fundamental role is to bring people the joy of Christ’s love and to be the appointed affirmers of others” (McKinnon 1990, pp. 37-38).

Priests I interviewed also maintain that celibacy has a specific and detrimental effect on a priest's sexuality. Fr. Luke, for example, said that he doggedly avoided questions about sexual intimacy and sexual orientation for nearly twenty years by stoically enduring celibacy. However, this attitude produced considerable strain in his relationships, which eventually resulted in immense suffering and loss. Drawing on the evidence of his experience, Fr. Luke argues that celibacy maintains an erroneous body-spirit dualism that undermines the wholeness and well-being of priests:

There is a deep mistrust of the body and of ecstasy ... There is an alienation between ourselves and our bodies. [The] alienation of the person from one's own body is the most horrible fragmentation that can happen. They don't talk about mistrust of body, they talk about spirit as if it were something else and we (priests) chose the higher[in celibacy] and go away from the body. [In effect], that puts a wedge between parts of ourselves and it becomes very hard then to grow together and become a full human being. Unless one really comes to terms with having a body and being a body, the body takes its own revenge now and again. It's very hard to achieve poise and equilibrium and balance of mind and body, and be able to operate as a whole, really well functioning unit.

Fr. Luke contends that estrangement in the fabric of a priest's very own being occurs when the spirit is divorced from the body; which is reflected in the elevation of celibacy and the subordination of sexual intimacy. This split results in an opposition within the individual, where the antagonistic forces of spiritual/celibate-as-good and body/sexuality-as-evil are so hostile to each other that a priest is unable to attain self-integration and achieve a balanced approach to life.²⁶

Fr. Simon elaborates upon Fr. Luke's view: *Priests who deny their sexuality go sour; they become very strict on others and become very rigid when it comes to doctrine.* Another priest also commented that the papacy's teachings damage priests' perception of themselves: *They don't see themselves as good or beautiful, as whole, they [have a] sense of [being] broken, diseased, dis-eased.* Fr. Sam adds substance to these claims when he recounts the following story. His young confrere, Fr. Mark, upheld everything that was orthodox: he always dressed in clericals, ensured that the

²⁶ The body-spirit conflict is further analysed later in this chapter.

rubrics of liturgy were strictly followed and in his pastoral ministry, he would *apply the letter of the law* particularly with regard to sexuality. One day, Fr. Mark attended a parish event in which he and his parishioners went swimming but unfortunately, Fr. Mark lost his swimsuit and had to leave the water naked. A parishioner offered him a towel but he refused. He then proceeded to don his cassock and immediately left the scene. The next thing Fr. Sam heard was that this young man had left the priesthood and was living with his *gay lover*. Fr. Mark lived in an environment that both demonised his homosexuality²⁷ and demanded that he practise celibacy, which he did scrupulously. Furthermore, he insisted that his parishioners also maintain sexual rigour in their lives. The parish event, however, revealed not only Fr. Mark's physical nakedness, but forced him to consider his personhood and priesthood from the additional perspectives of sexual and moral nakedness. Bereft of the exterior façade of priesthood, symbolised in clerical clothes, he acknowledged his homosexuality and need for intimacy beyond the celibate priesthood.

Fr. Tom also reports a similar example about a heterosexual priest. At a seminar for priests, a priest who was a keynote speaker frequently made insulting remarks about women. One priest in the gathering was quite disgusted by this behaviour; he slammed the lid of his desk down, got up, and walked out. Fr. Tom comments that this protest echoed the thoughts of others who were listening to the speaker. Ironically, two years later, this priest left the priesthood and married. Attacking and ridiculing women appeared to be his way of coping with celibacy but eventually this strategy became ineffective.

Several priests also indicate their belief that celibacy is a precipitative factor in certain priests becoming sexually dysfunctional in their relationships with minors. One priest who specialises in counselling argues,

I would maintain that the level of sexual maturation amongst Catholic clergy in general could well be compared to that found amongst adolescent boys. If, for example, you were to listen to some of the conversations amongst the clergy, gathered for drinks in the privacy of their own company, you could be forgiven for thinking that the average age of the gathering was

²⁷ Homosexuality is considered socially aberrant in the Church (see p. 88 and chapter seven).

between 15 [and] 18 years. Not surprisingly – sexual/relational maturation of clergy was in fact frozen at this stage; as many joined the seminary system in their teens; their contact with women was severed and so they went into life stunted. Emasculated. It is not merely coincidental that many of the clergy sexual abuse cases have been perpetrated against minors.

These observations have been examined in detail by various researchers. Kennedy and Heckler (1972, p. 8), for example, state that a large proportion of the priests “look like adults but, on the inside, they still struggle with the challenges of a previous level of development. The underdeveloped have not successfully passed through adolescence.” Furthermore, Sipe (1995, pp. 18-19) asserts that priests who abuse minors do not fit standard psychiatric categories. These priests are a product of their social system that is specifically clerical. These men sacrifice their psychosexual development in order to fit within the clerical culture, which demands intellectual conformity and asserts a male-dominant theology in God as Father, Son, and masculine Spirit. In this culture, emotional affirmation is given to men who are revered and powerful (pope, bishop, priests) and boys are treasured as the future of the Church. Women, on the other hand, are shunned except for those female tokens that are venerated as mothers and/or virgins, with each of these forbidden objects of sexual fantasy. Consequently, these particular priests are impelled to act out with individuals who are essentially at the same level of sexual immaturity, and they do so by splitting their sexual life completely from conscious adjustment to the system.²⁸ These conclusions are further supported by an in-house study commissioned by the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (1999, p. 17), which states that “most child sexual offences by priests and religious involve ephebophilic²⁹ rather than paedophilic behaviour and are frequently associated with situational factors relating to lifestyle and ministry.”³⁰ Regardless of these conclusions, the papacy contends that celibacy is not directly

²⁸ When these priests’ sexual behaviours are exposed, these men are more prone to suicide because of the inflexibility of their defences and their previously successful adaptation to the system that has been shattered by confrontation with the reality of their sexual lives (Sipe 1995, pp. 19-20). This tragic behaviour is examined in chapter three.

²⁹ Ephebophiles are men attracted to minors who have attained puberty (Sipe 1995, p. 14).

³⁰ “A new report cites obligatory celibacy for priests as a factor that can be responsible for cases of sexual abuse by clergy. *Time for Action*, produced by the ecumenical body, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), says that ‘many’ older Catholic priests have an arrested psychosexual development and serious sexual immaturity” (‘Ecumenical report on sexual abuse’ 2002, p. 32).

linked with priests' lack of wholeness and well-being. Anecdotal and clinical evidence, however, suggests that in some instances this argument is mistaken.

Priest respondents, including Fr. Ben, also comment on the problems they had previously experienced in practising celibacy, that is, prior to their friendships:

On the inside of my person, I was running fairly fast, and fearfully. Emotionally, I seemed to be working overtime. I made the mistake of not being still before this painful, personal need, of avoiding my sexuality by transferring it into over-energetic pastoral activity. I was on something of a roller-coaster ride of ministry activities, work, administration, and people! More and more, I was losing contact with my own inner self, and becoming over active. I never truly relaxed, even on days off, and any breaks and holidays I took, tended to be ineffectual. My health was beginning to deteriorate. I was steadily going down the burnout trail.

Fr. Ben had serious difficulties dealing with his public commitment to celibacy and the interior demands of his sexuality. In an attempt to cope with this contradiction, he endeavoured to perfect the total identity of being priest, that is, by being constantly available to his parishioners and attendant to institutional demands. Yet, in attaining this perceived excellence, Fr. Ben denied other dimensions of his self, which resulted in psychological and spiritual exhaustion that diminished his ability to carry out his priestly duties. Later, Fr. Ben formed a friendship with Susannah: *This was a very healing and healthy association for me; and, as a result, I have since grown very much in my own person, in confidence and self-possession.* After a few years, he left the priesthood to marry his friend, but his references to priestly difficulties continued: *We had a reunion [in our religious order], and many [confreres] remarked on how well I looked. And I do, I feel great. But I honestly couldn't say the same for them; they look so, so tired, haggard, over-worked and under-loved captains of embattled ships.* Fr. Ben continues to identify the total identity, inclusive of celibacy, as the source of his confreres' hardship and suffering.

Several of the priest respondents confirm how their friendships inhibit or halt manifestations of problems, as Fr. Jude explains: ... *having another person around often prevents temptation to other forms of sensuality which I can be prone to.* Fr. Jude is referring to excessive drinking and the possibility of multiple sexual liaisons.

He also went on to attribute his mental stability to his friend: *I know for sure that I'd be the most ... crazy, mixed-up priest that you could ever imagine.* Fr. Matt put it more bluntly: *Without her, I would go under.* Fr. Sam also indicates that his friendship stops him from being promiscuous: *I believe her being in my life has not only affected positively my ministry, but also my sense of well-being, and I am far more at peace with God because I am not "searching" around restlessly for new experiences of relationships.* Fr. Sam's friendship helps him to attain a sense of personal integration and spiritual poise, which provides a stable basis for his ministry. Moreover, the personal benefits for engaging in friendship are backed up by research. According to Sipe (1995, p. 67), "Most people can only access their spirituality and the reality of transcendence with the aid of direct sexual encounter – love within a sexual relationship." Being intimately loved is obviously a key antidote for priests who suffer from a lack of wholeness and well-being. Several priests underscore this understanding, including Fr. Luke: *when you touch [love], it touches you, and you are changed.* Fr. Mark reports, *my personal well-being has always been boosted when I have been in love ... knowing somebody out there is waiting for you to be with them is very ... uplifting.* Fr. Paul, however, says, *you suffer for love [but] it is better that you suffer than never love.*

The experiences of these priests and the conclusions of researchers radically conflict with the papacy's view that celibacy is appropriate for all priests. Meanwhile, the papacy ignores pleas for reform but does make recommendations that are supposed to help priests practise celibacy:

... let them practice mortification and custody of the senses.
[Priests] should take advantage of those natural helps which favour mental and bodily health. As a result they will not be influenced by those erroneous claims which present complete continence as impossible or as harmful to human development (Abbott 1967, p. 474).

As a panacea for priests' desire for sexual intimacy, the papacy suggests that they should engage in self-inflicted pain in order to control or put an end to their yearnings. Priests are also required to keep a guard on their sensory faculties and accordingly, they can do so if they engage in healthy activities of distraction, meaning here non-sexual activities. Yet, the papacy's tonics for celibacy fail to take

into account the needs and desires of priests for intimate friendships in which they can achieve wholeness and well-being.

The Commitment to Celibacy: Absolute or Contingent?

Those priests who seek to escape the negative consequences of celibacy by contracting friendships are required to re-examine their original commitment to celibacy. However, they can only conduct their life review in the hidden confines of cultural intimacy because the papacy insists that a priest's commitment to celibacy is absolute: "... we do not return the gift once it is given" (Curti 2002, p. 8). In effect, the papacy equates the morality of celibacy with a notion of transcendent perfection that is said to resemble Christ and hence, a commitment to this divine character is utterly non-negotiable. Conversely, the papacy also commandeers God in this commitment, for if "all beg of God that He may always lavish this gift [of celibacy] on His Church abundantly" then God is obliged to meet such humble requests (Abbott 1967, p. 567). Nonetheless, the papacy's use of various controlling mechanisms to reinforce this pledge between priest and God implies that it is relatively distrustful of the ability of both parties to preserve celibacy. Frequent Eucharistic sacrifice, formal daily prayers, constant salutations to confreres as "Father," and invocations to celibate saints:³¹ all these rituals imply that the papacy has little confidence that priests will take responsibility for their celibacy or that divine intervention will be sufficient to retain a priest's practice. Furthermore, formal reminders that priests must go to confession often, so as "to increase grace, to strengthen virtue and to prevent temptation", only aggravate suspicions that priests are failing to practise celibacy or that celibacy is even God's will ('Chastity critical for priesthood' 2002, p. 2). Yet, while these various spiritual aids may serve to restore the celibacy of priests, such surrender to the blandly homogeneous policy of the papacy denies a variety of contexts in which priests with friends recognize the negative consequences of celibacy and the positive aspects of friendship.

For numerous priests, with or without friends, the papacy's imposition of celibacy represents an intrusion into the local Church. In their memories of past relations of reciprocity in which they practised celibacy, these priests received sufficient

³¹ These controlling mechanisms are examined in detail in chapters three and six.

affirmation, adulation and care from less intimate sources, which they returned with spiritual favour and religious wares.

Now that time has passed and the established relationships of exchange no longer yield the same returns needed to balance the costs of celibacy, these priests look in all sorts of directions to restore the equilibrium in social interchange. Those priests who wish to uphold celibacy, for example, often encourage a coterie of like-minded parishioners to support them in their orthodox practice. On the other hand, I noticed that other priests compensate this loss of satisfactory exchange by enjoying luxuries such as going on expensive holidays, occasionally rationalized as taking a sabbatical. Similarly, others purchase expensive cars or clothes that attract a “safe” social return in attention and admiration. As well, priests can take on specialised ministries in which they establish a network of companionable and hospitable relationships that provide them with a sense of intimate belonging. Some priests, however, endeavour to restore reciprocity by contracting friendships. These priests consider love and intimacy as being necessary because they argue that it sustains and energizes their lives and ministries, which are often exhausted from negative reciprocity.

From an official perspective, priests with friends simply break the promise that they once gave to celibacy. Nonetheless, from the viewpoint of these priests, they feel short-changed by the moral corruption of the papacy that exploits celibacy for its powerful and centralizing purposes. Moreover, these priests consider that the papacy imposes a fallible belief system permeated with contradictions because it fails to take into consideration their plight. Consequently, these priests imagine a future and compassionate Church in which they can again be trusted to take responsibility for their personal and priestly lives, as they did once when they knew celibacy was right for them back then but in the current circumstances, they know that sexual intimacy is right for them now. Yet, such trust is unattainable in the bureaucracy-ridden present, for the papacy has restricted formal rhetorical resources to its own exclusive use, leaving priests without the means to negotiate alternative celibate-sexual responsibilities. Only the papacy can determine the parameters of priesthood: “... there can be no genuine priestly ministry except in communion with the supreme pontiff and the episcopal college, especially with one’s own diocesan bishop, who deserves that “filial respect and obedience” promised during the rite of ordination”

(John Paul II 1992, pp. 53-54). Nevertheless, in this demand for obedience, the papacy also provides the conditions for priests with friends to become skilled in deception. These priests, without any formally recognized sources of empowerment, take advantage of other questionable or illicit avenues to restore reciprocity, but as loyal priests they also attempt to use their imaginative activities to restore harmony, even provisionally, to the priesthood.

In order to carve out a bit of heaven from “the Rock,”³² priests with friends find that they need to renegotiate the original commitment they made to celibacy. In this rhetoric of resistance, these priests move from an absolute interpretation, as promoted by the papacy, to a contingent understanding of their promise. The priests whom I interview initiated this negotiation by undertaking a life review in which they reassessed the contexts in which they first made their commitment. These priests genuinely felt drawn to priesthood and were willing to commit themselves to celibacy for its own sake. Fr. Joel wittily emphasised this order of commitment: *I cannot remember anyone arriving at the Seminary saying they felt called to celibacy before priesthood. Most of them felt the call to ministry and this led us to accept the duty of celibacy.* Other priest respondents frequently reiterated this sentiment towards duty, including Fr. Tom who said, *Celibacy was not a big issue in those early days because I was totally taken up with my idealism.* These priests in choosing priesthood subsequently “offered up” their sexuality, foregoing wife/partner and children, so they could pursue their call to ministry. In this environment, these priests initially understood their sacrifice as part of God’s command for their lives as did Fr. Peter: *At that stage, I certainly would have...seen that it was a promise being made to God rather than the institutional Church. And I probably didn’t separate those two things at that point of my life.*

Yet, over time, this understanding was eroded and celibacy became recognized as an institutional requirement rather than a command of God. Fr. Cain highlights this

³² “The rock” is a euphemism sometimes used to refer to the pope. This metaphor is taken from Mt 16:18, where Jesus says, “you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church” (The name Peter comes from the Greek word *petros* meaning rock). This image is interpreted by the papacy to mean that the pope is the successor of St. Peter.

separation in his suggestion that God is not as absolute about celibacy as the papacy maintains,

I think the Spirit is saying that this kind of commitment is not meant to be permanent because it [has] almost [become] a sign of the times. What is happening with so many priests, is that they are suddenly forming a friendship ... the Holy Spirit is saying something, and the very fact that it is happening to a number of priests is kind of saying that the present Church's idea of celibacy may not be God's way of doing things.

Definitely, the Church fixes celibacy in law, but there's a lot of humanness in celibacy and it's time to acknowledge that hey, maybe the sign of the times is saying, there could be a change ... because where there is real love, the Spirit is there.

Fr. Cain, in resolving perceived contradictions with celibacy, believes God is saying something contrary to the papacy and that this needs to be acknowledged by all in the Church, including the papacy. He also explains how he understands this difference for he believes God's presence can be identified in *real love* expressed in friendship, a quality that he does not necessarily discern in confreres who practise celibacy. Fr. Zac also recognizes a supernatural presence in friendship: *An intriguing phenomenon that I have observed and heard about among celibates, ... is that of a powerful sexual awakening in mid-life ... Maybe it is the Devil, and/or a dark night of the soul experience OR maybe it is that their celibacy charism has been withdrawn and this is God's way of telling them!?* Each priest recognizes and responds to the supernatural in ways that accords with his individual experience and observations of confreres. Fr. Cain and Fr. Zac acknowledge the possibility that God is paving the way to another set of priestly circumstances where celibacy is optional and sexual intimacy is valued in the priesthood.

Fr. Dan, well versed in the disciplines of philosophy and theology, also explains his renegotiation of the promise of celibacy from the perspective of morality.³³ According to him, *promises are conditioned by their contexts and are not absolutes in themselves*. In Fr. Dan's estimation, priests do not simply make promises to essentialized ideas; rather, they bring to their commitments an understanding of their lived experience. Fr. Dan goes on to say: *If the context loses its validity so then does*

³³ The negotiation of morality is analysed in detail in chapter five.

the promise ... I made [a promise of celibacy] originally in good faith with the understanding of the situation I had at the time. But, eventually, the context changed and my faith in the purpose, place and even probity of the promise dissolved. The circumstances in which Fr. Dan made his original promise have changed so dramatically that it has undermined the moral integrity of the promise itself. For Fr. Dan, celibacy is no longer sustainable or defensible and his only moral option is to abandon such a promise. Subsequently, he chose to live in a state that accommodated the love of Sarah. Later Fr. Dan left the priesthood and married: *What inched me over the line was primarily my relationship with Sarah but that relationship only brought to a head the recognition that the better side of priesthood was being impeded more and more by bad philosophy, inherited bias, frustrated and disguised sexuality, plus unjust and uncourageous leadership.* Reciprocity, in effect, has become so negatively geared for certain priests that they have no other alternative than to abandon celibacy, which inevitably fractures the total identity of the priest as constructed by the papacy.

The Schemes Behind the Sacrament of Penance

Both the papacy and priests with friends have a stake in safeguarding religious belief, the public reputation, and the collective image of the priesthood because mutual benefits are dependent on their maintenance. The papacy, as official custodian of that belief, reputation and image, secure, in part, the high religious and social standing of the priesthood by instituting controlling mechanisms such as the Sacrament of Penance. In this ritual, priests with friends are required to declare their sin of sexual intimacy so that they might reconcile themselves to celibacy, thereby ensuring their salvation, and the tradition of the priesthood. Yet, for these priests, their understanding of tradition is much more nuanced: “There is Tradition (uppercase) and tradition(s) (lowercase). Tradition (uppercase) is the living and lived faith of the Church; traditions (lowercase) are customary ways of doing or expressing matters related to faith” (McBrien 1994, p. 63). Priests with friends consider priesthood is a “Tradition” of the Church, but they view celibacy as a nonessential and therefore dispensable “custom” of priesthood. By theologically and socially separating celibacy from priesthood through a contingent reading of their situation, these priests are able to continue their engagement in the priesthood by subtly negotiating the Sacrament of Penance. In doing so, they uphold the belief and

value that they consider constitute “Tradition,” and which they argue is essential to the ongoing life of the Church.

A brief theological overview of the Sacrament also helps to understand other religious, social and political schemes behind this ritual. The Sacrament of Penance can have two interpretations, namely, penance and reconciliation. The papacy, however, emphasises penance over reconciliation, which is in accord with its preference for hierarchical order within the Church. Penance stresses the importance of practising ascetism to overcome sin in one’s life: “[It is] an effort to overcome in oneself what is of the flesh in order that what is spiritual may prevail; a continual effort to rise from the things of here below to the things of above, where Christ is” (Mannion 1990, p. 936). Essentially, moral failures in matters “of the flesh” prevent sinners from being in communion with God. Such loss of salvation, however, can be restored if the penitent returns to God’s saving design through the gateway of the Sacrament of Penance, as mediated by Christ. This transcendent view, however, indicates a dualism between spirituality and the body, a view that has previously been considered by Fr. Luke. By subordinating sexual intimacy to celibacy, the papacy creates an opposition in which the concept of the “pure” priest implies celibacy: the corollary, being impurity, which implies sexual intimacy.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, on the other hand, is the preferred terminology of priests with friends and emphasises the “restoring to its communion those alienated from it by grave sin” or as one priest respondent stated, *it’s where people are reconciled to each other and therefore to God* (Dallen 1990, p. 1052). In this view, moral failure is produced by a breakdown in one’s relationships, which effectively jeopardizes the kingdom of God. However, by participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the penitent can be reconciled through a dialogue of healing and holiness that seeks to mend broken relationships. This immanent understanding suggests a holistic approach in which spirituality and the body, inclusive of sexuality is enjoined in the goal of achieving wholeness and well-being in a person within the context of a beneficent social context. Reconciliation, therefore, aims to end conflict, including the body-spirit conflict, and attempts to restore integrity and harmony within the individual. As well, it endeavours to reconcile disjunctions and

renew friendly relationships between disputing individuals and groups, including the papacy.

The Politics and Processes of the Sacrament

The papacy is able to suspend its endemic distrust of priests breaking their promises or vow of celibacy by discerning in its understanding of God's plan the means to suppress a priest's transgression: "Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church ... who ... have fallen into grave sin, and thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994, p. 363). In implementing this belief and subjecting this regulatory ritual to rules of obedience, the papacy ensures that priests recall a sense of moral duty and episcopal obedience within the secrecy of the confessional, which means a return to compliance and conformity in celibacy. Secrecy, moreover, is a key aspect of this particular controlling mechanism. With so much invested in celibacy, the papacy is keen to keep quiet the sexual activities of priests. The silence of the confessional certainly helps in this: "The sacramental seal is inviolable. Accordingly, it is absolutely wrong for a confessor in any way to betray the penitent, for any reason whatsoever, whether by word or in any other fashion" (*The Code of Canon Law* 1983, p. 177). A confessor priest is required to absolutely and eternally maintain the secrecy of a penitent's admission of guilt, for if the seal was broken, he would be at risk of being suspended from ministry and more grievously, jeopardizing his salvation. No such canonical prohibitions, however, apply to a penitent priest who is at liberty to divulge the content of his confession.

The penitent priest is also advantaged by secrecy because such confidentiality allows a priest to regain his celibacy without shame or fear of disclosure. This hiddenness helps him to retain his credibility as priest, pastor and leader of his parish, and his good standing in the diocese. More broadly, secrecy facilitates the restoration of the hierarchical order, which enables the maintenance of the official façade of the celibate priesthood (and indeed much else as well), keeping intact the priesthood's reputation. Secrecy, however, can nurture a heterogeneous priesthood. For instance, Fr. Mark reported: *in the big cities, there are priests who are known to be expert at kindness. So often, you would chose one of these priests.* This choice gives priests with friends a good deal of leverage in the penitential system by claiming the right to

be confessed and directed by confreres who overlook or accept their friendships. Other priests with friends also indicate that they select priests who are known to have similar relationships in which confession is essentially, *you tell me yours, I'll tell you mine*. Secrecy is consequently negotiated to advantage both the papacy and priests but it also provides an environment in which seeds of dissension can be fostered.

Those priests who were interviewed indicated that the frequency of their participation in the Sacrament varied although they are required by canon law to confess their sins “at least once a year” (*The Code of Canon Law* 1983, p. 178). Apart from habit, ingrained from childhood, feelings of guilt play a major role in urging these priests to seek absolution for their sins. These feelings result from an awareness that they, as priests have crossed the moral boundaries as circumscribed by doctrine and canon law. Yet, this awareness of wrongdoing has its source in the papacy that decides what is shameful, what is sinful, and what merits penance. By making celibacy a moral condition and inculcating this principle in each priest, it subsequently creates a ‘holy’ and socially produced personal judge that resides in a priest’s conscience. This internal first-order judge metes out guilt when the rules are broken, which pressures a priest to amend his illicit behaviour before God and others through the Sacrament. Fr. Luke elaborates on this process of judgement: *There is almost a corporate guilt essence, captured in a container and released on unsuspecting [priests] who dare to move outside the norms – it keeps them in control*. Other priests also shared their previous experiences of guilt, including Fr. Paul: *I had strong taboos within me in regards to sex and much of my relating to God in those days was spent either on guilt trips (for “impure” thoughts or actions³⁴)*. To relieve these burdens of guilt, these priests use the Sacrament to confess their sins and undertake penance to restore their position in the priesthood.

With self-reproach, the penitent priest duly confesses his sins: *Bless me Father, for I have sinned*. With feelings of guilt over his sexual dissipation, a priest makes himself entirely vulnerable to the confessor priest who acts in the person of Christ, as mediator between mankind and God, and as the papacy’s proxy. The confessor

³⁴ The phrase, “impure thoughts or actions,” generally refers to sexual fantasies and masturbation, the latter which is particularly regarded by the papacy as “an intrinsically and gravely disordered action” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994, p. 564).

priest then responds by prescribing penance to the penitent priest. According to priests who were interviewed, the routine penance for *solitary sins*³⁵ is *three Hail Mary's*.³⁶ In the case of sexual activity with another person, *you make an act of perfect contrition*,³⁷ *maybe a decade of the Rosary, [and/or] a prayer for the priesthood. If you don't make that amendment then you can't receive absolution.* Yet, the sexual transgressions of heterosexual and homosexual priests can be treated differently. Particular sins, known as reserved sins, cannot be absolved without the express permission of the bishop and in some dioceses, "homosexual acts" are registered on that elite list. Nevertheless, Fr. Thomas reported: *In confession, nobody says much at all. Its sort of like, well, that's their business and you know that they will do it again. It's a hidden secret you don't talk about. Non-verbally, there is an acceptance of sexual activity amongst priests.* Penances are dependent on the judgement of the confessor priest, but behind the official façade of celibacy, *sexual activity amongst priests* is becoming increasingly accepted.

The confessor priest then formally absolves the sins of the penitent priest. Having received the sign of God and the Church's forgiveness, the penitent priest then signs a pattern over himself in which he symbolically "puts on" the "The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit." In donning the supernatural mantle, a priest becomes like Christ who according to the papacy, is celibate.³⁸ Once forgiveness is extended, normal celibate relations are temporarily restored in the priesthood: the penitent priest forgets his past misdemeanours, which are now behind him, and turns toward the future in which his salvation is now assured. According to Fr. Jonathon, *some priests feel a huge sense of relief, of having lifted the burden of their guilt* after they

³⁵ "Solitary sins" is a euphemism for masturbation. One priest shared his experience of confession *in the box* with regard to his habit of masturbation. For years, confessor priests had told him that his sinful ways were not of God, *that it was filthy, that I shouldn't call myself a priest, that it was negative and disgusting. One day I entered the confessional and the confessor said, I'm not giving you licence for this, but have you ever thanked God that you can ejaculate, that everything is operational, and for the beautiful person you are? I just broke down and cried and cried.* The papacy considers masturbation deviant, for it is an independent and individual act that fails to contribute to the maintenance of hierarchical order; details of which are analysed further in chapter seven. This confessor priest, however, holds a more relational view of masturbation in which he regards it as an act that expresses sexual wholeness that has positive spiritual, personal and social dimensions.

³⁶ A Hail Mary is an intercessory prayer, which petitions the "Mother of God," to "pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

³⁷ An act of perfect contrition is a particular prayer which is said with a deep sense of shame over one's sins and a firm resolve not to sin in future.

³⁸ The notion of Jesus Christ as celibate is examined in chapter six.

have received absolution. These particular priests have an intense fear of sexual sin, believing that they are totally separated from God. Burdened by a deep anguish, the Sacrament is the principal way in which these priests can restore their communion with God. Yet, for a limited number of priests who were interviewed, the gravity of sexual sin has become significantly reduced: *For some priests [the Sacrament is] almost a routine thing, for some it's like brushing your teeth.* These particular priests are in the process of developing another belief system in which sexual intimacy is considered a part of God's grace working in their lives and ministry. Thus, these priests are not unduly concerned about their confessions of sexual activity.

These priest respondents, having shifted to the moral ground that includes friendship in their priesthood, begin to consciously renegotiate the Sacrament in light of their own experiences. On the face of it, the confessions of these priests seem contradictory, but from their perspective, they try to maintain a mutual loyalty to both the priesthood and their friends. Fr. Philip explains his effort of reconciling the disjunction: *I wouldn't class sexual intimacy with my particular friend as a serious sin. It's kind of tradition to go to confession, the way we were brought up. There's always that tension of years and years of training. So there's just a bit of guilt, but not major guilt. I wouldn't lose any sleep over it.* Fr. Philip then expanded on the meaning of his understanding by explaining his predicament: *Being intimate with a woman is not a negative guilt; [confession is] something mechanical – even though you don't think it's a sin, the Church does. It's a kind of insurance. It's a part of the Catholic habit.* Fr. Philip tries to consciously reconcile his priesthood with his friendship and while his habitual participation in the Sacrament signifies his loyalty to the Church, *confession would never stop me doing it again. What I did was deliberate and conscious.* This priest effectively negotiates his continued place in the priesthood, whilst giving equal priority to his friendship. In effect, Fr. Philip indicates how priests can rhetorically reconstruct the Sacrament to accommodate their own belief systems.

Some priests with friends, however, are not able or willing to negotiate differentiation between the papacy's expectations and their own personal and priestly experiences in the context of the Sacrament, as is the case for Fr. Jacob,

I have stopped going to confession because I do not believe the present relationship is against God's wishes. It challenges me to fidelity the way no Church ruling could. Sex will be part of our relationship. Not being genitally intimate with others is also part of my relationship with her. To be forgiven for breaking my vows I have to call the sex we have a sin and I have to say that I do not want to be with her again. If I broke my commitment to her, I could go to confession every three months but God is calling me to commitment not away from it.

For Fr. Jacob, the Sacrament can only be used on the papacy's terms. From his perspective, the confessional acts as a spiritual courtroom where his case is to be heard according to a strict interpretation of canon law. With no court of appeal available to him, Fr. Jacob argues that his only option is to forgo the use of the Sacrament if he is to maintain his commitment to his friend. In adopting this stance, Fr. Jacob also exercises a form of local resistance, refusing to be controlled by the belief system of the papacy while upholding his own.

Fr. Paul is also torn between the rules and his love for Sarah. Sarah once challenged him by saying that if he ever felt that their lovemaking was a sin before God, *then [he] should forget it*. This proved to be a watershed for Fr. Paul: *You know, I would have held quite an orthodox approach to that area of sexuality, sex outside marriage was illicit, sinful*. Then Fr. Paul was faced with his own situation, and he had to ask: *What would lead me to think differently?* After careful consideration, he came to an understanding: *That in a truly committed relationship that isn't taken lightly, and where there is a real mutual relationship, there is room and a place for that expression of love*. Fr. Paul, in effect, prioritises a relational view over and above one of legalism. I then asked Fr. Paul how he felt when he celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which he does regularly: *I'm not altogether comfortable in front of God, because I have a whole mind-set that was there for years. Not only did I accept this, I also taught it, although we would have offered the possibility that it was acceptable for engaged couples to become sexually intimate*. In acknowledging a degree of latitude with regards sexually intimate relationships, he then went on to say, *It took awhile to become comfortable with the idea of not confessing the sexual nature of our friendship, but I still have qualms on occasion*. These qualms seem to revolve around issues of selfishness. Fr. Paul considers that looking after one's own wants, needs and desires while ignoring those of others is the epitome of sinfulness.

In this priest's view, which is directed by non-reciprocal giving, it is difficult for him to sustain the idea that it is reasonable to have his needs and desires met through receiving intimacy. He also believes that his friendship with Sarah *would have been just as deep without that [sexual] expression*. A degree of body-spirit dualism is still apparent in Fr. Paul's thinking and, as he says, every time he participates in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, *it would be a deliberate decision not to say anything*.

Yet, I discovered that some priest respondents are well on the way to resolving the contradictions that present themselves in the Sacrament. Fr. James, for instance, said: *Once I crossed the boundaries, I had to re-define my understanding of God*. Fr. James says, *guilt ... began to wane and I found myself relating to a God who was with me – in the very midst of my struggle* [original emphasis]. *For I figured out that, after all, it was God who created me, the whole of me, with my sexuality – and therefore it must be good*. Fr. James maintains God is with him in the depths of his struggle to bring about a higher level of self and sexual self-integration. Fr Luke also indicates: *Now I don't experience that guilt. I can still see the finger of God in my own life and in my ministry*. This priest appears to have successfully integrated his friendship into his priesthood. In separating the supernatural from the papacy's understanding, these priests, with God now at their side, diminish the papacy's control through guilt. No longer are these priests' sexually intimate friendships an issue for them when they participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

These priests with friends have undergone a conversion in their understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They reconfigure their rhetoric in order to meaningfully engage in the ritual in which they reconcile themselves to God and others in ways that emphasise the importance and value of loving and mutual relationships, inclusive of their friendships. In some cases, residual understandings of God, who as distant Father judges and chastises the sinful child, remain. Most of these priests, however, appear to be adopting a new image of God, who is Friend and Lover. Such a God desires that each person ends conflict, indeed sexual conflict, within one's self, and, as well, seeks or restores friendly and loving relationships that are whole and therefore, inherently holy. Thus, these priest respondents have set aside an ethic of perfection, which emphasises the riddance of sin through the practice of penance, and have replaced this with an ethic of holism. In their subtle

acknowledgement of this moral principle, these priests recognize the integrity and goodness of God's creation. From this perspective, a priest seeks a sacramental encounter that helps him to achieve wholeness and well-being. Moreover, this analysis also indicates a change in the way these priests understand the hierarchical order of the Church. Previously, they emphasised the penitential character of the Sacrament, which results in the maintenance of a Church constituted in rank. Now, these priests emphasise friendships with God and others, which evokes personal and social images of a community secured in bonds of mutuality. These latter understandings of the Sacrament consequently reflect an egalitarian organization of Church, which is in stark contrast to the papacy's demand for the continuation of a rigid hierarchy.

Dialogue: A Solution to the Problem of Celibacy

In pursuing wholeness and holiness within the priesthood, priests with friends hope for a future in which they and their confreres can openly engage in loving relationships, are healthier and happier in their own selves, and are able to minister in ways that are more relevant to the contemporary era. In their bid to promote such an ideal, these priests have also determined solutions for the current impasse. Fr. Luke, for instance, suggests: *The requirement of celibacy needs to be optional. Then the Church will be enriched with more freedom for, and greater commitment from all who have then to decide responsibly as to how they will express their sexuality in their full-time ministry.* Indeed, priest respondents stated that the reason why they contributed to this research is that they strongly believe that celibacy needs to be formally discussed, as did Fr. Ben and Fr. Barney:

We, as a Church, should openly debate this very relevant topic of celibacy, among others, with its effects and defects and its impact on the priests and people. The challenges offered by such discussions would bring to the Catholic Church a new and vibrant people, committed to their Church and openly working for its betterment. What could be wrong with that?

I don't know what is going to happen to the Church in the future because marriage is going to create all sorts of problems, but certainly compulsory celibacy has created lots of problems. And I thought, if nobody ever says anything, if nobody ever speaks up, its not going to change. So one of my reasons for taking part in this [research] is that I will tell my story for what its worth and

perhaps if enough priests tell their story things might change.

For these particular priests, issues surrounding celibacy could be addressed if all Catholics, priests and lay alike, came forward and talked about how it directly and indirectly affects their participation in the life of the Church. Such an open exchange of information would be, in Fr. David's opinion, *the key to a healthier and happier Church.*

Priests who were interviewed assert that such dialogue would result in changes to celibacy. Fr. Joel argues: *The canon should be changed. [Celibacy] should not be compulsory: it should be put as a counsel of perfection rather than law.* Fr. Mark also determines the conditions under which such changes might occur, *And it will change, simply because the celibate male clergy are dying out. So, when they reach that stage when they are really low, the Church will change. But as with most things, the Church changes only when it's forced to.* For Fr. Mark, the success of priests' resistance is highly dependent on whether the papacy considers it expedient to change, which indicates how imbalanced reciprocal relations are in the hierarchical Church. In contrast, Fr. Ben considers that while the current model of priesthood *inhibits change, ... it accelerates change ... the current model ... is at fault: the current model where the priest is like the little god with all the gifts and he's in charge.* Fr. Ben suggests that the longer change is impeded in the Church, the greater the likelihood radical reforms will be instituted. In his view, oppressive conditions experienced over time force people to cope with their situation through invention. The current circumstances, therefore, create and clarify criticism of the current belief system, consequently provoking an alternative system that aims to topple the existing regime.

Fr. Timothy and Fr. Adam both expanded upon Fr. Ben's idea:

Mind you, I think married clergy is just one of the changes that will come. The big change is in the model of priesthood, this kind of full-time, life-time, kind of a thing ... I think there will be men who are ordained for a certain period and I think its got to be extended to women. You'll be looking at different models of priesthood altogether. I think that's where the real change will come from. Celibate or married clergy will be rather minor ... in the overall development of the Church.

The bottom line for me in all of this is the urgent need of reform within the official Church. This will not happen until the ground swell grows bigger, more vocal, and efficient among lay people. The whole issue is NOT about celibacy, ordination of women, married priests, etc., etc.. It IS about authority, leadership and power. As it has been from Day 1.

Fr. Timothy underscores the need for a plurality of priestly models of priesthood that are appropriate to different social contexts, and which are not necessarily based on particular sexual criteria. Fr. Adam considers the underlying problem is the papacy's use and abuse of its *authority, leadership and power*, which manipulates sexuality for its own purposes. One provincial of a religious order, Fr. Stephen, further entertains alternative models of priesthood, which includes "*part-time priests, priests at week-ends*" whilst holding secular employment. This would undermine the myth of the priest the man apart which is not necessarily a bad thing, but it would also introduce priests more into the workplace and into the ordinary experiences that most people have access to. Collectively, these views suggest that the notion of a priesthood that is separate and superior is fading, while a priesthood that values ordinary everyday life and therefore, sexuality, is taking on a new status within the Church. Consequently, these priests consider broader structural issues should be addressed, and that the current understanding promulgated by the papacy is no longer appropriate for the organization of the Church.

Despite these priestly forecasts, priest respondents are aware of the objections to change, and the consequences for its advocacy. Fr. Stephen has already experienced such repercussions: *[When] somebody with some degree of authority in the Church speaks out in this way and questions the discipline [of celibacy], then one is seen to be letting the side down. I was called by one of them a "Judas."* Branded as a traitor to orthodoxy, Fr. Stephen indicates that those who are not open to change are likely to try to control priests or others from speaking out about celibacy by disparaging their character. In this event, a protagonist created an iconic resemblance between Fr. Stephen and Judas, the biblical character who betrayed Jesus, to convey the idea that any person who advocates change to celibacy will bring about the destruction of the priesthood. However, everyone has access to this rhetorical strategy. Fr. Stephen subsequently responded with a similar tactic, suggesting that such people are

ignorant of Church teaching: *Most of them aren't aware that celibacy is a matter of Church discipline, rather than a command of Jesus or one of those things that can be changed. There is a failure to distinguish between what is central Christian doctrine and what is, in a sense, peripheral Church discipline.* In devaluing his protagonists' performance, Fr. Stephen selects particular interpretations of doctrine to render celibacy relatively unimportant. According to the hierarchy of truths held by this priest, celibacy is situated in a lower rank – a dispensable custom - significantly removed from what he considers is essential criteria for priesthood.

Fr. Stephen also identifies reasons for these objections: *People are fearful of change. People are fearful of those who have any authority [to make change]. [Because, as a result,] many of the certainties and securities they are afraid to question might inevitably have to be questioned.* According to Fr. Stephen, these people wish to preserve the existing system even though there are particular contradictions present. When I asked Fr. Stephen if he could identify groups who might object, he responded: *Eminent people in right wing Church organizations; those who come from European countries; those educated prior to Vatican II who have not received any updated information.* Firstly, people in right wing organizations generally favour the preservation of the existing order and are averse to, and distrustful of, change. Secondly, conservative Europeans tend to have a Euro-centric view of the Church that discounts other expressions of Catholicism. Thirdly, the Second Vatican Council required Catholics to update their knowledge of the Church, however, many Catholics have not done so. According to Fr. Stephen, politics, culture, and education seem to be the key areas that have to be addressed if changes are to occur. He also extends his comments about objections to change by the papacy: *with all due respect, although the Vatican can make adverse comments, you can never close down the debate on clerical celibacy.* By exercising his authority of experience, Fr. Stephen considers that the current dispute in the Church over celibacy is not likely to abate and will continue to exist until the issues that priests and others raise are addressed. Nevertheless, according to Fr. Stephen: *in the present pontificate, with the present consensus we will not re-open discussion.* In his view, the papacy of John Paul II with its inflexible policies utterly refuses to consider change because its belief system and the way in which it governs the Church is dependent on maintaining the *status quo*.

An Assessment of Priestly Strategies

The distant papacy promotes the total identity of a priest by confining him to a celibate existence that limits public expression of priestly alternatives and his personhood. The papacy argues that this is the only proper way for a priest to identify himself and, if he follows the prescribed spiritual directives, God will look after his priesthood in a way that is proper and good for him. Priests with friends and certain researchers, however, contend that these claims are false. They make their arguments by voicing their concerns about the lack of wholeness and well-being of some priests, which they consider is aggravated by celibacy. For these priests, the existence of these problems is one consequence of the contradictions they perceive exist between public expectations and private experiences. Thus, priests with friends endeavour to resolve their difficulties in intimate friendships that provide them with the beneficial disposition they require for their lives and ministries.

In order to be at peace with this intimate but illicit contract, these priests have had to renegotiate their original commitment to celibacy, which they now understand as being historical and contingent, rather than absolute and eternal. In doing so, they have endeavoured to negotiate a bridge between institutional unity and individual will. These priests define their moral purity not in opposition but in the redefinition and contemporising of the priesthood's values. They locate these values in their sexually intimate friendships. Such localized relationships are mutual and reciprocal, which is in contradistinction to the one-sided advantage advocated by the distant papacy. In rejecting a simplistic opposition between the values of the papacy and priests with friends, a viewpoint that suggests that these priests treat the priesthood without any regard, these priests translate the dialectic between doctrinal and local concepts of priesthood into a dialectic between social order and strategy. These priests do not pit their priesthood against that papacy. What they try to do is to make the priesthood more relevant and accommodating of their own and others' personal and priestly needs, so that they can effectively minister to their parishioners.

As a part of the process of contemporising the priesthood, priests with friends are reassessing how they understand themselves through the Sacrament of Penance – or as priest respondents prefer to name it: The Sacrament of Reconciliation. These

priests have been able to do this because these priests exist in a shared and contested universe of theological and pastoral discourse. They, therefore, have at their disposal the very same strategies that the papacy has to uphold its beliefs and expectations. Through this Sacrament, priests with friends can reconcile their new identity. These priests do this principally through their renewed relationships with God and others by emphasising the importance of contextualized relational wholeness and well-being rather than abstract social perfection. Consequently, priests with friends are able to challenge and reverse the ecclesiastical monopoly of celibacy through ritual by re-orienting its intent to uphold their personal and priestly purposes. This manoeuvre provides the symbolic means for creating conditions under which mutual trust, theoretically impossible in the formal priesthood and the public domain, can be restored. The pragmatic corollary of this symbolic construction is that priests can thereby limit the effectiveness of the papacy's judgements of their friendships.

The current situation is extremely unequal in its effects and its recognition is likely to be realised by more and more priests. This is because the practice of officially disguising such inequalities with a rhetoric of pristine tradition is becoming steadily less convincing as the religious, social and political dimensions become more direct and obvious. Furthermore, as the direct interests of the papacy are revealed through various avenues, its mantra of celibacy as a "gift" is undermined. Consequently, this banal control of traditional and spiritual wealth leaves the papacy looking less and less like the selfless soul whose mantle it has for so long claimed for itself. As a result, the papacy has begun to occupy a different space in the Church. Complaints about progressive corruption, priests' lack of wholeness and well-being, the frustrations of secrecy, and the difficulties of not being able to find resolutions to pressing problems increasingly challenge the autocratic reputation of the papacy in which it is answerable to no one. Moreover, while the papacy does not publicly accept priests with friends, it has ironically risen to power and maintains it partly through the patronage of such priests. Yet, the papacy has disguised this embarrassing situation behind constant denunciations of precisely the practices that those with clerical and other ambitions have perpetuated so effectively. Meanwhile, priests with friends insist that these growing tensions can only be resolved with dialogue, but without such facility, the façade of the priesthood, indeed of the Church, is increasingly in danger of collapsing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the necessary difference between the total identity as established by the papacy and a negotiated identity that is produced by priests with friends, which is sensitive to their lives and ministries. While the total identity is used to regulate the life and ministry of priests, such an ideal can only be realized under certain conditions. The papacy in recognizing the contingent nature of human life attempts to regulate these conditions through ritualised controlling mechanisms in which institutional expectations take precedence over that of priests' experiences. However, an abstract ideal bounded by a controlling mechanism fails to take into account changes in conditions in which subalterns live to the extent that these circumstances can prompt review or rejection of such an ideal. Nor does the ideal of the dominant social group factor in human limitations and compelling desires that reach beyond such an essentialized and reified concept.

The total identity and a negotiated identity therefore have distinguishing features. Unlike the papacy, these priests are open to the contingencies of life and ministry and consequently negotiate their priestly identity accordingly. As a result, priests with friends argue that these contingencies have produced a situation in which celibacy produces negative reciprocity that can result in a lack of wholeness and well-being. The acknowledgement of human limitation, however, is not just about the inability to live a celibate life in the current conditions because of some lack on the part of an individual priest. It is also about an attraction towards somebody and something that priests with friends regard as necessary. These priests seek not to perfect the abstract ideal of celibacy, but rather relationships of intimacy and love that are sensitive to the dynamics of their everyday lives and ministry, where, in their view, exchange relations are brought into balance. This dispute over differences between the total identity and a negotiated identity comes to the fore in controlling mechanisms in which institutional expectations pressure the denunciation of experiences. Thus, subalterns challenge a total identity through reviews and revisions of controlling mechanisms in which attempts are made to resolve contradictions that these differences entail.

Attempts to resolve contradictions solely at an informal level create disjunctions within the priesthood because differences between the total identity and a negotiated identity are inhibited by official expectations. As a result, negotiations of priests with friends remain limited because the papacy continues to formally espouse a rhetoric of control through its penitential system in which these priests are constantly pressured to restore celibacy. Yet, priests with friends recurrently affirm that they are not about to give up their friendships. Meanwhile, this dialectic continues to seek synthesis and one important avenue that can be used to resolve differences between the total identity and a negotiated identity is the use of formal dialogue. Within this form of exchange, there lies the potential for aligning the different representations of identity, which create conditions that could once again homogenise the identity of the priesthood. Yet, dialogue suggests that truth is held within a relationship rather than being a quality that is held by one disputing party. A dominant social group is, therefore, unlikely to concede that subalterns might contribute to veracity because any change to social policy cannot be tolerated because its belief system is embedded in this practice. In chapter three, consideration is given to how the papacy essentializes and reifies the ideal of celibacy within the ritual of Eucharist, and again how priests with friends resist celibacy by contesting the papacy's interpretation of this ritual.

CHAPTER THREE

The Ritual Organization of Celibacy

The papacy promotes Eucharist as “the source and summit of the Christian life” and only validly ordained priests can preside over the ceremony (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994, pp. 334, 355). In the central task of his vocation, the priest stands alone, set apart from the congregation as an *alter Christus*³⁹ to offer sacrifice and oblation to God on behalf of the community (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994, p. 356). A priest’s solitary Eucharistic activity can also be a metaphor for his social singularity, reflected in his obligation to live celibacy. Eucharist, however, can also be understood as a ritualised communal meal, requiring a priest to follow the example of Jesus and break bread with his parishioners. Such social attachment and mutual sharing at table can additionally serve as a metaphor for friendship, indeed, sexually intimate friendship, which some priests desire and form.

In this chapter, I first show how hegemony can be sustained by securing the meaning of a ritual. Through an emphasis on an interpretation of Eucharist as sacrifice, the papacy is able to promote a coherent belief system and hierarchical order in which celibacy is fundamentally embedded. In giving consent to these beliefs and consequent order, priests can then resolve the difficulties of their practice in their ritual activity. In doing so, these priests ensure that rigid boundaries are maintained in the priesthood and Church, which upholds institutional exclusivity. I then demonstrate how erosion of hegemony can produce contradictions in which alternative meanings of ritual come to the fore. Changes in the world and Church, along with an increasing concern about what is being sacrificed for celibacy has pressured some priests to reconsider its practice, which has, in turn, impacted on their understanding of Eucharist. As a result, priests with friends negotiate this ritual by emphasising an interpretation of Eucharist as a communal meal. In this interpretation, these priests assert a belief system and social order that promotes hospitable inclusivity, which accommodates their friendships. Nevertheless, priests with friends must be publicly seen to uphold the papacy’s emphasis on an interpretation of Eucharist as sacrifice. An awareness of contradictions, however,

³⁹ Latin for “another Christ.”

produces an ideological struggle that ensures that the meaning of a ritual that has been hegemonically held in the past can never be restored.

Hegemony and Eucharist

Hegemonic leadership essentially involves producing a coherent worldview, based upon moral, intellectual and theological policies, which is accepted by major groups in a culture (Bocock 1986, p. 37). The papacy is in a powerful position to give such leadership, for it is able to mobilise the consent of its worldview in which celibacy is deemed essential for the priesthood. The papacy does this through Catholic media, education, and juridical system, aspects that will be examined in chapter four. Celibacy, however, is also maintained through Eucharist, a regular and continuously repeated ritual that reinforces social order within the Church. This ritual binds Catholics to the acceptance of the papacy's leadership in which particular moralities and identities are promoted in a seemingly persuasive manner. Through Eucharist, the papacy is able to universalise its interests in celibacy by attaining the active consent of priests. By accepting celibacy, priests assume it is in their own, the priesthood's, and the Church's interest to do so. Such unreserved consent subsequently results in priests considering celibacy as common sense and 'natural' for their lives and ministries.

Hegemony, however, has an underside to its practice. Hegemony additionally allows for the exercise of force against those who contest the existing moral system and social order. The papacy is able to activate sanctions and marginalise priests who challenge celibacy in a way that appears to be based on the consent of the majority of Catholics who accept its punitive measures as appropriate. In effect, priests who are found to be contesting celibacy are prohibited from celebrating Eucharist, for such an action calls into question the papacy's leadership. This resistance and dissent can fuel a crisis in the dominant ideology; thus, hegemony can never be considered fixed, and is vulnerable to contesting ideologies. Priests who become detached from the papacy's ideology of celibacy and no longer believe what they used to believe previously are a significant threat to the papacy's position in the Church.

Priests with friends are constantly reminded through Eucharist and in the broader Catholic context of the disadvantages of celibacy and set about to improve their

situation within the priesthood through word and deed. The papacy, however, is set apart from these priests, and consequently remains uninvolved in their struggles. As a result, it attempts to reassert its control through rhetoric by quelling opposition to its policy of celibacy. Such actions can result in increased violence, including ostracizing and demonising dissident priests, as well as producing situations in which some priests inflict violence upon themselves. Meanwhile, priests with friends have acquired a consciousness in which they maintain that celibacy produces undesirable inequalities in the priesthood and Church. As a result, these priests engage in an ideological struggle, which aims to produce another set of hegemonic social relations that advantages their position in the priesthood, and is accepted by other Catholics. The following section considers how the papacy upholds its belief system and hierarchical order through its emphasis on an interpretation of Eucharist as sacrifice. This is then followed by an analysis of the ideological struggle between the papacy and priests with friends within the ritual context.

The Socially Ordered Play of Eucharist

Eucharist is the principal sacrament of the Church in which bread and wine are consecrated and then eaten and drunk to commemorate the last Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. This religious rite is simultaneously a sacramental reenactment of the sacrifice of Jesus and a thanksgiving meal that strengthens the social bonds between God and the Church, and between peoples that constitute the Church. The dual characteristics of Eucharist are further represented by respective images: sacrifice emphasizes the divine where the transcendent God is predominantly considered distant and authoritarian; while the communal meal principally emphasizes humanity, where God, incarnated through Jesus, is believed to be immanent and compassionate. These commonly accepted sets of images are also used to represent different social orders, namely, a hierarchical community and an egalitarian community. Thus, when one characteristic of Eucharist is emphasized over another, the respective social order governs the organization of the Church. The papacy particularly favours “the eucharistic sacrifice ... (as) the centre and root of the whole life of the priest,” for without sacrifice, a hierarchical order cannot function (Ternyak 2002, n. 13; Jay 1992, p. 113). More importantly, this hierarchical order upholds the papacy’s faith in a particular understanding of God, who demands the obedience of mankind.

In the promotion of Eucharist as sacrifice, a priest acts not as an ordinary man but *in persona Christi Capitus*,⁴⁰ a supernatural mediator between God and the faithful. Set apart in the sanctuary from the lay congregation kneeling in the nave, a priest who has the exclusive power to sacrifice, offers petitions and prayers over the gifts of bread and wine to create symbolic equivalences with Christ. On the altar, the transubstantiated “body and blood of Christ” is offered to God to cleanse the sins of the people. All present at the Eucharist then recognize and accept this sacrifice by drinking from “the Cup,” and eating “the body of Christ.” In sacrifice, expiation rids the Church of its sins, which damages hierarchical order, while communion restores that order: mankind is subordinated to God, and similarly, lay to priest, and woman to man. This principle of subordination also enables the papacy to symbolically produce and maintain a priesthood constituted by a unilineal descent system of males. In this descent system, bishops generate the apostolic lineage of “Fathers” by passing on the “apostolic seed”⁴¹ (Jay 1992, p. 118; Abbott 1967, p. 39). Women are not needed as mothers, nor do priests need to become actual fathers (Beers 1992, p.168). Only celibacy is required for this type of patriarchy, which effectively upholds male privilege and prerogatives in the Church.⁴²

As the offerer of the sacrifice who stands in divine company, a priest is required to be pure, and this officially defined concept again emphasises the distinction between the divine and human. Celibacy is used by the papacy to represent that purity, thereby implying that women and sexually active men are impure and therefore have an incompatibility with the sacred. Meanwhile, the papacy asserts that ritual purity is not demanded of priests, yet purity motifs are still implicit in various promulgations. This is evidenced by such phrases as “perfect chastity in priestly celibacy” and “the grace of purity and fidelity in the obligation of celibacy,” which are used to support its implicit purity legislation in celibacy (John Paul II 1992, p. 56; John Paul II 1993, p. 11).⁴³ The papacy also maintains, “In virginity and celibacy, chastity retains its

⁴⁰ Latin for “in the person of Christ the Head [of the Church].”

⁴¹ Latin for “seed” is *semen*.

⁴² Patriarchy will be further explored in chapter seven.

⁴³ One representative of the papacy, Archbishop J. Francis Stafford, in his presentation of his paper, “The Eucharistic Foundation of Sacerdotal Celibacy” at an international symposium on celibacy held in Rome, argued “that the Christian priesthood is simply the fulfilment of the Levitical priesthood and cont.

original meaning” (John Paul II 1992, p. 55). Accordingly, in mythical Eden and before the Fall, there was no sexual intercourse. Priests are therefore required to represent that original perfection of chastity in celibacy. Also associated with the papacy’s concept of the “pure” priest is the idea that celibacy resembles the divine and transcends the earthly state represented by sexuality, the latter being associated with women, childbirth and mortality. Through celibacy, the priest is said to illumine the world to come: “they are made a living sign of that world to come in which the children of the resurrection shall neither be married or take wives” (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). Embedded in the use of this scripture verse is the claim that celibacy is an exclusive eschatological witness that “radiantly proclaims the Reign of God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994, p. 395). By giving absolute and eternal fixity to the meaning of these metaphors, the papacy precludes all other sexual states from being regarded as pure, thereby making celibacy the sole state worthy of altar service.

Church doctrine emanating from the Second Vatican Council, however, has blurred the interpretation of Eucharist as sacrifice. Prior to the Council, the liturgical pattern reflected the firm belief in the Mass as a sacrifice in which the priest and his actions were held distinctly separate from the people. Everything was centred on the priest at the altar, Latin as the language of the elite was used, the priest’s back was turned to the people during consecration, and only the priest communicated from the Cup.⁴⁴ But such a sacrificial emphasis, along with its associated hierarchical order could not be fully sustained in the post-war era. The Church was living and functioning largely within more or less liberal, democratic societies. This fortress mentality, which set the Church against the world, was no longer able to insulate Catholic society from the world. Nor did Catholics for the most part wish to be insulated. Outside the

the Old Testament covenant and is now ‘concretely realised in the eucharistic representation of the new covenant’ and thus demands full and perpetual ritual purity” (Sipe 1993, p. 737).

Winter (1996, pp. 428-432) also asserts that there are undertones of ritual purity in doctrines used by the papacy to support celibacy. For example, in the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests, in which it is claimed that the “Church from apostolic times has wished to conserve the *gift of perpetual continence* of the clergy,” the papacy supports this view by a lengthy footnote citing conciliar and patristic texts as evidence. Winter, however, explicates how these texts were originally constructed by the Church Fathers in the fourth century to support ritual purity.

⁴⁴ At the moment of consecration, where bread and wine are sanctified by the priest, Catholics believe these elements are turned into the body and blood of Christ. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, this “mystery” was hidden from the view of parishioners.

Church, change was being marked by the beginnings of space-travel, the spread of communism, sounds of rock-and-roll, and Western affluence that led to extended education, resulting in fewer people giving uncritical acceptance to the directions of paternalistic clerical leaders. Internally, there was growth in the liturgical movement, the lay apostolate, biblical scholarship, and the need for Catholics to participate in democratic politics (Hastings 1991, p. 3). All these social developments consequently pressured John XXIII (1958-1963) to convoke an ecumenical council to facilitate *aggiornamento*, or updating of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) was a concerted effort to reform and renew the Church in relation to the modern world, but it was not unequivocal. For example, the Council adopted democratic notions such as collegiality, freedom of conscience, synodal structures and emphasised human rights, although the organizational order remained hierarchical and the priest's prominence was still emphasised (Collins 1997, p. 192). The Council also re-evaluated marriage and stressed the relationship between Christian love, sexuality and friendship. This development gave some priests the rationale for replacing the traditional claim that celibacy is the better, if not the only road to perfection with the understanding that marriage and celibacy are different but equal paths of Christian perfection (Schoenherr and Young 1993, p. 266; Abbott 1967, pp. 250-58). Sexuality, therefore, could no longer be considered impure, which eroded ritual purity as a necessity for sacrifice.⁴⁵ However, deliberations about celibacy were exempted from the overarching reappraisal of the Council, but new reasons were found to justify its practice and for the first time, a biblical exhortation taken from Mt. 19: 11-12 was given for celibacy (Abbott 1967, pp. 565-67).⁴⁶ At the request of Paul VI (1963-78), the matter of celibacy was not publicly discussed. Consequently, the practice was reaffirmed and priests were still set apart as “witnesses and dispensers of a life other than this earthly one” (Abbott 1967, p. 537). Meanwhile, concessions to modernity also affected the Eucharistic

⁴⁵ Beaudette (1994, pp. 362, 367) also states, “Ritual purity, signifying the church's separateness from the world, no longer made sense” when the Second Vatican Council adopted an attitude of openness and engagement and even an embracement of the world. A shift of emphasis also occurs in the Latin text of “Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests” in the Second Vatican Council documents, where the cultic term for a priest, *sacerdos*, is replaced by the more pastoral term for priest, *presbyter* (Hurley 1991, p. 145).

⁴⁶ This scriptural image used to uphold celibacy will be examined in chapter five.

liturgy: the laity were encouraged to actively participate, Eucharist was to be said in the vernacular, they were permitted to communicate with the Cup, and the priest was to now face the people, which in effect, diminished priest-lay distinctions. This blurring of the essential difference between the priesthood and laity, was reflected further in the adoption of democratic notions that rendered the unilineal descent system less distinct, which subsequently created substantial difficulties in maintaining the sacrificial emphasis on Eucharist and a hierarchical order (Jay 1992, p. 113).

Some Catholics, priest and lay alike, in the wake of this sea change, have looked critically at the meanings variously ascribed to Eucharist, often using biblical exegesis and historical analysis as avenues to determine liturgical relevancy. Theologians such as Kung, for example, reject the importance that the papacy gives to expiatory sacrifice. Kung argues, “Jesus’ “sacrifice” must in fact not be understood in the Old Testament or the pagan sense. In the New Testament, sacrifice is not meant to be a conciliatory influence, putting an angry demon into a good mood. Man has to be reconciled not God” (Kung 1976, pp. 424-25). Indeed, the only New Testament book, namely, Hebrews, which mentions both priesthood and sacrifice, separates the lineage of Jesus from that of the Jewish priesthood and is about ending all sacrifice.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Hebrews mentions neither the Eucharist nor Church offices (Jay 1992, p. 116).

Moreover, in the search for meaning, contemporary scholars have tended to focus on the communal meal aspect of Eucharist, as exemplified by Crossan (1995, p. 69) who claims that Jesus advocated radical commensality, in which “society’s vertical discriminations and lateral separations” are disposed of.⁴⁸ This egalitarian view threatens the papacy’s ideology of celibacy by asserting that all people are, in

⁴⁷ According to Jay (1992, pp. 115-16), for the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, the system of Levitical (Aaronid) sacrificing is obsolete, superseded by the eternal priesthood of Christ ... [for] the “Son who has been made perfect for ever” (Heb. 7:28) has achieved eternal continuity with the Father, and there is neither need nor possibility of future sacrifices (Heb. 7:27; 9:25-26; 10:5-10, 12, 14, 18, 26).

⁴⁸ This act of eating together can be understood as a symbol of human interaction: “Eating is a behaviour which symbolizes feelings and relationships, mediates social status and power, and expresses the boundaries of group identity” (Klosinski 1988, p. 69).

principle, equal and should enjoy equal social, religious, political, and economic rights and opportunities, which is in stark contrast to a hierarchical order.

In my research, I discovered that priests with friends tend to hold the two interpretations of Eucharist in tension, but are inclined to give ritual emphasis to the communal meal. In this latter Eucharistic emphasis, a priest is principally recognized as the Eucharistic president at the table around which parishioners are gathered.⁴⁹ The priest also understands himself as being elected by the local community to fill that position, but it is one position amongst many that is regarded as important to the vitality of the Eucharist. Key people, priest and lay alike, have both the privilege and responsibility to ensure the communal meal is prepared and celebrated by all participants. At this ritual meal, bread and wine, which are used to represent the basics of life, are shared, and in this common participation, particular relationships are established. Instead of promoting priestly authority that asserts clerical domination, the presider with the assistance of other participants seeks to establish interpersonal relationships that develop and empower each other to take responsibility for the Christian community and their relationship with God and others. In this social situation, sacrifice is redefined and associated with an egalitarian view that is committed to improving the lives of others, in contrast to the papacy's view, where sacrifice orders an individual to his or her hierarchical rank, thereby maintaining social inequalities.

The Ritual Sacrifice of Sexual Intimacy

The papacy's strategy of upholding hierarchy through celibacy has immediate consequences for a priest in his ritual activity. In Eucharist, he is required to resemble Christ who according to the papacy gave "the Church, the gift of his body given and his blood shed" (John Paul II 1992, p. 45). Likewise, the papacy obliges the priest to give his body to the prescribed order of the Church, but for some priests this obligation comes at a formidable price. During my fieldwork, Fr. John recounted the misery he had endured because of celibacy. Years ago, he had fallen

⁴⁹ An example of this is when there are small gatherings, and the president invites those in the congregation to gather around the table in the sanctuary, often asking them to join hands. The creation of this symbolic circle emphasises togetherness, which is in contrast to sacrificial separateness.

in love and for this, his bishop moved him to a distant parish far away from his friend. Time passed and Fr. John continued to struggle with celibacy. Sometimes he experienced moments of sexual intimacy in passing friendships and while he could not sustain a relationship for fear of disclosure, neither could he bear the loneliness that left him feeling wretched. When I interviewed Fr. John, he was again enduring the pangs of an ended friendship. Later, I attended the Sunday Eucharist he was celebrating and was acutely aware of how his agonies hung on the cross of priesthood, dramatically reflected in the huge crucifix that hung behind him in the sanctuary. The following records my interpretation of that event, based on my personal knowledge of Fr. John's troubles with celibacy and his unrealised desire and need for love in an ongoing friendship.

Alone Fr. John stood at the altar, overshadowed by a large corpus hanging on the cross, the consequence of human faithlessness that severed life from love. Yet, his loyalty attempted to transcend this betrayal and troubled though he was, Fr. John took up the cosmic host and by rote gave voice to hollow words of adulation.

On the night he was betrayed,
he took bread and gave you thanks and praise.
He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:
Take this, all of you, and eat it:
this is my body which will be given up for you
(Winstone 1982, p. 77).

As he broke the bread, loneliness appeared to break his body, for at that moment he slumped as if his carriage had buckled under an unbearable burden. The "heavens and earth" seemed suspended, while the truth of two tears slowly rolled down his cheeks. In that brief uncontrolled moment, he challenged us to know life as he did, for the sacrifice of his sexuality was the price of his priesthood. He struggled to regain composure and then continued. Later, after the Eucharist had ended, some of the congregation left in habitual quickness, while others gathered in the porch. Indifferent parishioners and the priest now with jovial mask greeted each other, hiding the fleeting revelation behind the façade of comfortableness and continuity.

In that brief event, the Eucharist became literally dangerous; as with the original crucifixion it exposed the scandal of pharisaic behaviour that imposed rigid and

harsh laws on its citizens. This ritual irruption rendered all concerned vulnerable, for the priest's wretched experience of celibacy threatened to sully the Eucharistic liturgy, and threaten the prescribed hierarchical order. Yet, by regaining emotional control, Fr. John returned the Eucharist, and the Church, to its domesticated form that demanded he sacrifice loving companionship. The papacy, by stressing the sacrificial emphasis of Eucharist, continues to deny this priest the veracity of sexual intimacy necessary to relieve the heartbreak that plagues his life. The pope and bishops are not in favour of such a solution, for as one other priest cynically remarks, *even if it means sacrificing his heart, a [friend] must not come between a [priest] and God*. This view is confirmed by the papacy, for rather than see an end to celibacy, it insists "our only hope is to challenge new priests to a life of sacrificial service" (Burke 1990).

The Daily Sacrifice to Celibacy

The ritual sacrifice of sexuality is also reflected in the everyday lives of priests, some of whom are well aware of the personal costs involved. These priests no longer feel comfortable about moulding themselves on the official template of celibacy and consider that they have sacrificed their sexuality to the system: *For most of my life, I have had a sense of nagging loss, all for the sake of some idiotic ideal. It's not a sacrifice [for] what's valuable*. Fr. Jacob spelt out that sacrifice more specifically, blaming the papacy for denying him opportunities for intimate human companionship:

They slam the door of human warmth and ecstasy in [priests'] faces not entering themselves, and filling the hearts of those who would with fear and dread. They bind heavy burdens on [priest's] backs, and don't lift a finger to help.

For Fr. Jacob, the demand of celibacy has warped his sexuality with terror, and emptied his relationships of intimacy. In his grief over the loss of sexually intimate friendship, Fr. Jacob remains disgusted at the lack of awareness and compassion of the papacy for those priests who suffer from its law.

Priests with friends recount the price they pay for their priesthood in terms of forgoing a wife or partner and they express sorrow over lost opportunities: *What a*

shame I wasn't free to enjoy [friendship] 20/30 years ago; my best years are behind me. In addition, these priests give vent to grief over their sacrifice of fatherhood, as did Fr. Paul and Fr. Mark: [My] sorrow [is] that I would never "be able" to father a son; I would loved to have had a son. Fr. Dan even named the son and daughter he would never have after his two favourite biblical characters. Other priests went onto nominate when these feelings of loss become acute: There are the good and bad times – it gets bad when you baptise a child or when you marry others. Fr. Joel quietly states: At one stage it even became painful for me to visit them in hospital when they had a new baby – the sight of which made me grieve for the loss of natural fatherhood. Fr. David contends: The sad thing about celibacy is that it has made me like a tree with neither root nor fruit. These priests are not always alone in their grief, their friends are also sometimes implicated in their loss: We have shared about the sacrifice of not being able to immortalise ourselves in our children, said Fr. Joel and Sr. Mary. The sadness of not having one's lineage perpetuated is again reflected in one priest's sorrow: In three generations, may be even in two, I will be totally forgotten.

The priests' awareness of the sacrifices that are entailed in celibacy also extends to their confreres whom they consider similarly suffer from the denial of intimate friendship: *I see priests who do their job but they are so un-giving. [They] cut off communication as soon as it becomes "You and I." Life is kept so functional, everybody is kept in his or her box and the priest keeps himself locked away in the celibacy box. In this priest's view, Catholics are ordered to their hierarchical rank, objectified as sexual cogs in the machinery of the Church. Fr. Bart further observes,*

Many older clergy/religious have not been able to liberate themselves and appear to live out their final years in a vacuum. They had their beliefs which set them apart from others, it even made them feel better than the 'common herd of humanity.' But most of that has been undermined and these folk have been left dangling. Some hold onto the old form but I know that many harbour a deep anger against the Church for misleading them and foreclosing opportunities.

Fr. Bart considers that priests remain within a rigid celibate framework that cuts them off from intimate contact and all its potentialities. They are also caught between the pressures of the institutional Church and the dynamics of social change,

and consequently harbour feelings of betrayal. While these priests may uphold their promises and vows of celibacy, the papacy and the broader Church break the social agreement in which celibacy is considered a worthwhile sacrifice. Now, such priests find themselves in a predicament where the rewards of commitment to celibacy are not matched by the loss of intimate love and family. Fr. Cain reiterates this quandary: *I look on and see my brothers in their retirement having companionship and care that is denied me. I am unsure if I resent all that or have the bravado of erstwhile years to suppress those feelings and to say that I am enjoying the way it is for me.* In a transformed priestly environment, these priests experience the irreparable burned-out feelings of having dutifully forsaken intimacy.

The Sacrifice of Priests

The papacy is prepared to risk enormous resources to maintain its belief system and hierarchical order, and this is particularly evidenced in its willingness to “offer up” priests to what Fr. Adam refers to as *the golden calf of celibacy*. In recent years, there have been a number of claims that suggest the Church is quite literally killing priests, and that the papacy’s policy of celibacy is implicated in their deaths. Dorff (2000, p. 7), for example, maintains, *we are killing priests because we equate the present exclusive, male, celibate, clerical paradigm with the essence of priesthood.* This lethal paradigm is further expressed in the everyday lives of priests. While priests experience the same high levels of stress found among other professional groups, some of the causes are unique to the priesthood. Priests are on call twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week and assume a life-long commitment. They maintain high levels of responsibility for the lives of others, and are often intensely involved in the life crises of people. The sacralization of the priesthood also evokes an idealization of clergy by the laity, which places high expectations on the shoulders of priests. In addition, the limits of ministry are not clearly defined and hence, the priest is expected to be a veritable “Jack of all trades.” This role ambiguity is also compounded by lack of recognition for hard work and commitment that contributes to burnout (Swinburne 1991, pp. 46, 54).

The burden of stress is also compounded by particular situational characteristics. Significant numbers of priests live and work within the walls of the presbytery, leaving no personal space to escape from the pressures of ministry. Being always on

call does not help a priest to diffuse a constant sense of responsibility for others and prevents him from living a balanced life. In addition, a priest has contact with a large cross-section of people and is inevitably recognized wherever he goes. This gives him very little opportunity to de-role as conversations inevitably return to parish matters or personal problems and concerns. Priests may also count many acquaintances, but considerable numbers of priests have few, if any, close friends (Swinburne 1991, pp. 51-56). Priests are, therefore, subject to pronounced levels of occupational stress due to the degree of personal investment in the work role, and the lack of stress-mediating effects of social support because of their present commitment to celibacy (Swinburne 1991, p. 60). Such an admixture has concrete consequences, as was the case for one priest: stress led him to hang himself. The statement that was issued after his death indicated that he had made himself available to all who asked, but that “this giving had been at his own expense, leaving him exhausted, burnt out and in need of rest” (“Burnt-out' priest hangs himself' 2002, p. 30).

Priest respondents often say they have chosen to mediate stress by engaging in intimate friendship. Fr. Joseph, for example, asserts the importance of his friendship in upholding his personal and priestly well-being: *Just having a cup of tea or ringing her gives me a chance to restore my flagging energy. I don't know how I could survive without Elizabeth.* Fr. Adam also expresses his gratitude for his friend: *at times, she is my sanity.* Yet, these imaginative solutions threaten the papacy's understanding of the Church and consequently, it promotes its own methods for overcoming social pressures that can threaten the celibate commitment of a priest.

We know well that in the world of today particular difficulties threaten celibacy from all sides ... But they can overcome these difficulties if suitable conditions are fostered, namely: growth of the interior life through prayer, renunciation and fervent love for God and one's neighbour and by other aids to the spiritual life; human balance through well-ordered integration into the fabric of social relationships; fraternal association and companionship with other priests and with the Bishop, through pastoral structures better suited to this purpose and with the assistance also of the community of the faithful (Synod of Bishops 1998 (1971), p. 689).

However, the problem for the papacy is that when this advice is translated into the local realities in which a priest finds himself, such abstract solutions frequently fail to address some of the substantial complexities he encounters in his everyday life. Thus, when local problems arising from celibacy are multiplied the world over, the magnitude of the dilemma for the papacy, priests, and the Church at large, is realized.

The papacy's policy of celibacy is implicated in the departure of an estimated 100,000 priests that have resigned since the Second Vatican Council, many of whom have since married (Rice 1991, p. 24).⁵⁰ Moreover, this policy has in part contributed to almost half the world's Catholic parishes and mission stations being without a priest (Rice 1991, p. 24; Padavano 2000, p. 3). Such a shortage of priests has also resulted in *ad hoc* responses that stretch the limits of priests' endurance. Dorff (2000, p. 7) states: *Our strategies of combining parishes, building mega-churches, denying priestly sabbaticals, extending the retirement age of our priests, calling priests out of retirement and importing priests from third world countries to minister to the [Western world] all have this ... character.* The extent of that sacrifice is further symbolised by the example of a seventy year old priest who is responsible for ten parishes (Padavano 2000, p. 3).

Yet, the papacy is caught in a dilemma because celibacy is inculcated in its belief in God. Such "faith has to do with that which is reliable, that which gives security, that which can be trusted" (O'Donnell 1987, p. 376). An individual or a categorical group's faith is often expressed through obedience to what he, she or it discerns as being God's will, and this can be measured by perseverance in times of trial. In consequence, the papacy is not about to give in to this historical and social test and waive celibacy, particularly when it is certain that its agenda comes from religious, social and moral principles that flow from God. Nonetheless, this project of

⁵⁰ According to the *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae*, the Vatican's statistical yearbook, 57,791 priests left between 1964-1996. It is, however, customary for this book to give only the number of departures from ministry for which Vatican dispensation has been given. Yet, under the current papacy, the granting of dispensations has been slowed down. New policies formulated in 1980, stipulate that dispensations are to be granted only to older priests who have left the active ministry for a number of years (Gaine 1991, p. 251). Furthermore, priests wishing to leave the priesthood have become less disposed to subject themselves to the degrading dispensation procedures and therefore submit no application for dispensation ('Real Number of Married Priests Worldwide' 1999, p. 22).

maintenance is being carried out under an exhaustive weight of change, and is being further challenged by other beliefs and value systems. Increasing numbers of priests, in reflecting upon *the signs of the times* do not consider God has given them the charism of celibacy but they do believe they have a vocation to the priesthood. These priests, therefore, continue to plead with the papacy to waive the rule because they *still want to sacrifice their lives for Christ but not be unnecessarily killed* (Sanders 2000, p. 254). As a result, the priesthood is increasingly beleaguered by polarized views and practices. Indeed, I listened to priests such as Fr. Peter, who contend that *all is being sacrificed on the altar of celibacy*. Thus, the papacy is faced with the dilemma of a growing numbers of casualties to its ideological policies, while priests must consider whether celibacy is worth the sacrifice it requires of their lives and ministries.

“Sweating Blood:” The Trauma of Contracting Friendship

Priests, despite the papacy’s remonstrations, continue to form friendships even though they may experience a high degree of anxiety when contemplating or engaging in such relationships. This concern is often borne out of the problem of how to reconcile illicit sexual behaviour with the licit requirement of celibacy. In paying attention to this problem, I discovered that priests cope with this dilemma in different ways. Some priests, for example, use their sexual experience to restore their celibacy by forming their own meaning of this practice (Sipe 1990, p. 86). Other priests are able to integrate a repertoire of statuses, roles and selves into a plausible whole, as exemplified by most of the priests who responded to this research. Meanwhile, some priests are unwilling or unable to negotiate their sexually intimate friendships in a definition of celibacy⁵¹ and a number of these priests leave the priesthood. However, during the transition phase, they are often filled with anxiety,

For the man who leaves, the acutest anguish usually comes before he decides, or before he acts on his decision. It is endured in silence and loneliness. And it can go on for years ... it could still take ‘an average of four to five years’ agonising ... before walking out of the door (Rice 1991, pp. 48-49).

⁵¹ Priests with friends’ ability to negotiate friendship within a definition of celibacy is examined in chapter five.

A conscious clarity eventually emerges and a priest prepares to leave. Yet, for a few priests that clarity is not achieved. Often during the phase of leaving, *there are thoughts of suicide. And sometimes, the act of suicide* (Rice 1991, p. 48). Such is the cost of upholding the ideology of celibacy for these priests.

During my fieldwork, I listened to the woes of Fr. Jesse, burdened by both celibacy and the papacy's condemnation of his homosexual orientation. It was a sad tale filled with details about the difficulties of his circumstances and ambivalence towards the papacy. Torn between loyalty to the Church and sexual integrity, Fr. Jesse felt he lacked a future: *There seems no hope of any change for me. I have always run away when I was faced with trouble, now there is simply nowhere left to run to.* For two years, he struggled over his dilemma and thoughts of suicide constantly accompanied what seemed an interminable impasse. Finally, Fr. Jesse chose not to run to the grave: love for his friend steered him away from that action because he did not want to burden his beloved with inevitable grief and loss. Fr. Jesse also concluded that suicide *would be a kind of slap in the face of God who I believe gave and gives me this life, and who is responsible for none of the things that have robbed me of my backbone and curdled my joy.* This priest resolved his issues of loyalty and integrity by eventually leaving the priesthood. Fr. Jesse's love for the Church remains but he continues to denounce the papacy that he now regards as *villains whose instincts have been twisted by society/culture/religion, and in their search for natural fulfilment turned nasty and vicious.*

I asked another priest, Fr. Joseph if he had ever been troubled by thoughts of suicide. Yes, he had, and went on to say that his bishop too had been *on the edge of a pit of dark despair.* Fr. Joseph further reports that he knows of priests who have committed suicide, but that alternative verdicts such as death by accident are given. Sipe (1990, p. 213) adds to this anecdotal evidence by stating, "four of the five reports of suicide we reviewed were intrinsically bound up with the sexual conflicts in pursuing the celibate idea." Rice (1991, pp. 1-2) also cites further incidences of relationship-related suicide. One such priest was particularly troubled by what might happen if he declared his friendship of twenty years. He worried over the idea that people were talking about him and feared above all that his mother might know he

had left orthodoxy. In not being able to resolve his love for his friend with the threat of being deprived of his priesthood, he hanged himself. In his farewell letter, his last thought was for some of his parishioners: *be more friendly and generous with your priest and do not leave him alone at the altar* (Rice 1991, pp. 1-2). The Church attempted to cover up the suicide as a sudden illness, but a confrere reported it to the media. Undoubtedly, this priest identified his solitary confinement at the altar as the nub of his considerable pain. Such isolation tormented him both in Eucharistic ritual and everyday life, which he suffered under a shroud of silence. In this tragedy, the self-immolation of this priest echoes too, the immolation of Christ. As *alter Christus*, he quite literally ended up being *sacrificed on the altar of celibacy*. In upholding the ideology of celibacy, this priest paid the ultimate price.⁵²

The Papacy's Maintenance of Priests' Sacrifices

The papacy has a different view of the sacrifice entailed in celibacy. Any problems associated with religious motivations and social practice lie not with the mandate based on Jesus' "ideal of celibacy" but with particular individuals (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). Priests are universally called to turn their attention towards service to the Church, and away from their own needs and desires. Indeed, celibacy is publicly understood by the papacy to reflect "the love of God which surpasses all limits," including the limits of a priest's humanity, inclusive of his sexuality. In the embrace of this transcendent love, celibacy is said to "help overcome the difficulties which often result from concentrating on self, on one's personal interests, on the private sphere" (Hillenbrand 1993, p. 4). In this paradigm, no theological worth is attributed to the love reflected in friendship, or the value that love contributes to the wholeness and well-being of a priest; rather, it is discounted as a distraction to priesthood and a disordering of the hierarchical Church. Essentially, priests are to sacrifice themselves in order to give total service in a way that discounts the offering of their friendships' contribution to the totality of that ministry.

Furthermore, it is not apparent to the papacy why celibacy should be considered an overwhelming problem, or for that matter, investigated. In the Vatican, there is an

⁵² In my research, I also listened to the stories of friends of priests who, after the cessation of their relationships, had seriously contemplated suicide, with one making an actual attempt.

abundance of priests who are seemingly willing to embrace celibacy. In this exclusive environment, the papacy promotes unflinching loyalty to the Church and those priests who faithfully carry out its policy are duly rewarded. This social exchange is made more effective by the celibate context. Without spouse or family to vie for their time, affection and money, priests are not only more willing to respond to the demands of the job, they generally are more psychologically and emotionally dependent on its rewards. As a result, the sacrifices made in practising celibacy in this environment are mitigated by compensation given in the form of status and privilege. Hence, there is no hint in the Vatican that around the globe, the Church is suffering from or at least feeling the negative effects of a priest shortage, part of which can be attributed to celibacy, which has resulted in widespread Eucharistic famine. This is so, because, in part, there is no lack of priests in Rome who are, at least on the face of it, willing to comply with celibacy (Mickens 2000, pp. 323-328).⁵³ From the perspective of a rarefied world where there are priests aplenty, there is no need to give credit to claims and studies that assert there is a need for the reassessment of celibacy.

Convinced of God's will in the matter of celibacy, and with a high-level of public support for celibacy within the Vatican environs, the papacy is in a position to reject claims made by those who are at the periphery of its bureaucratic centre. This is evidenced in a Vatican report entitled "New Vocations for a New Europe" (Congregation for Catholic Education 1997). In the papacy's evaluation of the shortage of clergy in Western Europe, there is no mention of the most frequently cited reasons given by Europeans for their apathy and withdrawal from the pews, namely, widespread sexual misconduct among clergy and the refusal of the papacy to address modern-day concerns. Included in these petitions is the request made by Catholics in nearly every European country to drop the celibacy requirement for priests (Heilbronner 1998, p. 14). The papacy, however, gives other reasons for the vocations shortage, such as Europe's "weak and complex culture," and the "weak" educational system both within and outside the Church (Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, n. 11). Youth are also said to be at fault, because they "do not

⁵³ Two priest respondents, both of whom frequently travel to Rome, claim celibacy is not maintained by significant numbers of priests in that particular environment.

possess the ‘elementary grammar’ of existence, they are nomads: they move around without stopping either at the geographical, affective, cultural or religious level; they are ‘trying out’” (Congregation for Catholic Education 1997, n. 11). In blaming Europe’s culture, education system and youth for perceived weaknesses, the papacy is able to deny that celibacy is a factor in the decline of vocations. Yet, such doctrinal tactics are unlikely to alleviate the shortage of priests or return those Catholics who have departed from the pews, because the papacy does not take into account the multitude of voices that call on the papacy to address various local concerns, many of which relate to sexuality.

In the infrequent instance where official studies are made of celibacy, such research is usually incapable of registering the evanescent subtleties of code switching. Questions geared to obtaining statistical results are, for example, insensitive to the indeterminacies of social and cultural dynamics; voting for or against celibacy can mean many things to many priests. According to Kennedy and Heckler (1972, p. 13), “some of those priests most resistant to a change in the celibacy law are those who are most threatened by possible contact with women.” These priests may wish to preserve celibacy, not for its purported advantages, but for keeping at bay other members of the Church. Two religious priests that I interviewed also advocate celibacy for religious orders even though they continue to enjoy intimate friendship. This indicates that the definition of celibacy held by a priest may contradict the definition of celibacy implied in a questionnaire.

Some homosexual priests are also unlikely to vote against celibacy. The papacy believes “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered” and therefore, “Homosexual persons are called to chastity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994, p. 566). This places homosexual men in a cultural predicament, which can be effectively resolved if they join the priesthood. Celibacy can put an end to questions about sexual orientation and provide a pragmatic rationale for their dilemma: *I’m celibate not gay*, as one homosexual priest respondent knowingly stated. Alternatively, celibacy can provide practicable cover for the homosexual orientation, sexual practices and relationships of a priest whilst allowing him to maintain a life of service, status and privilege. Given that “anywhere from 23 percent to 58 percent of priests have a homosexual orientation,” it is therefore unlikely, in light of the

papacy's homophobia, that these priests would seriously challenge celibacy (Cozzens 2000, p. 99). A response to official studies of celibacy can therefore be skewed because of other reasons that are ideologically conditioned by the papacy. Yet, ironically, the papacy's understanding of sacrifice is subverted. Celibacy is not so much about giving up of something valuable; rather, it can provide social cover for the trading of self-interests.

In the rare case where official research does publicly challenge celibacy, the papacy goes to considerable lengths to downplay its conclusions. A well-known example of this strategy is the aggressive reaction given by the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) to the study of the priesthood conducted by Schoenherr and Young (1993). The US bishops originally sponsored a nine-year sociological study, which was based on a meticulous census registry of some 36,000 diocesan clergy in 86 dioceses from 1966 to 1984. Research findings were gradually released through private interim reports to the U.S. hierarchy but several bishops became irate over the gloomy projections and sought to quash the project. The USCC then ceased sponsorship; however alternative funding was made available to complete the task, resulting in publication of the study. Subsequently, Cardinal Mahony attacked the researcher but not the evidence. Schoenherr had been a former priest, and was accused of using the study to push his personal agenda of optional celibacy. Schoenherr and Young responded that they had scrupulously adhered to the data, reserving their personal conclusions to the last three pages of the book, where they declared,

... we believe the church is being confronted with a choice between its sacramental tradition and its commitment to an exclusively male celibate priesthood. One of the most critical aspects of this confrontation is that most church leaders have failed to accept responsibility for the choice. Instead, they focus on stopgap solutions to the ever-worsening priest shortage while hoping for a dramatic increase in vocations ... The need to decide whether to preserve the eucharistic tradition or to maintain compulsory celibacy and male exclusivity looms ever larger as the priest shortage grows (Schoenherr and Young 1993, pp. 353, 355).

Though sociologists have not challenged the figures and projections in the study, criticisms similar to Mahony's have appeared with some regularity in diocesan and other Church publications (McClory 1998, p. 6).

In effect, the papacy is not interested in research outcomes about celibacy; its concerns are predominantly related to doing what it perceives to be the will of God. Moreover, where there are no official numbers or no concrete information about celibacy, protests against celibacy cannot be officially sustained. Nonetheless, the papacy's denial of the excessive cost of celibacy and the tendency to make scapegoats of dissenting individuals and categorical groups, promotes paradoxical dynamics that continue to generate serious challenges to its position on celibacy. Such challenges are a result of the mutual dependence on official and popular idioms of priesthood that the papacy and priests share, for both parties have an investment in maintaining its privileges and prerogatives. Therefore, if the papacy refuses to heed the warnings of these advances in research, it risks creating a significant gulf between official and local idioms of priesthood, sacrificing, in effect, the unity of the Church. As a result, priests are likely to express increasingly disparate and oppositional opinions and practices.⁵⁴

Priests who have no recourse to formal channels to express their concerns about celibacy may voice their concerns not just to selected confreres within cultural intimacy but also to outsiders, albeit to those who are privileged like me. One such priest respondent was adamant that *the bishops have to start listening to the [priests] rather than Rome*. Fr. David also argued, *the problem of celibacy will not be solved until bishops and priests find some way to speak honestly about sexuality and the priesthood*. Yet, in the event that such opportunities for expressing concerns were made formally available to priests, the papacy would have to at least implicitly

⁵⁴ This has been made evident in a recent survey that shows many parish priests in England and Wales disagree with Catholic teaching on contraception, clerical celibacy and homosexuality. Of the 1,1482 priests who responded to the survey, "nearly half the priests were opposed to the Vatican's stance on contraception. A further 19 percent were unsure about the policy. ... One quarter of the respondents were no longer convinced of the need for chastity, and 21 per cent thought that practising homosexuals should be allowed into the priesthood." The Bishops in England and Wales subsequently attacked this study saying that the statistics, having been gathered in 1996 and 1997, were out of date, and that the terms used in the survey were confusing ('Bishops dismiss survey on priests' 2003, p. 30).

entertain the possibility of a reversal of its policy of celibacy, which could potentially usurp its belief system and hierarchical order. In the meantime, only bishops have the vote, and under the current papacy, membership of this elite group is highly circumscribed. Vatican officials select, often without consultation with the local Church, bishops who are papal loyalists, which ensures that the papacy's policies will be observed at the diocesan level. These bishops, in turn, insist that priests, seminary professors and other Church personnel publicly support papal teachings, which maintains hierarchical order in the Church.

While bishops can canonically "exercise their own authority for the good of their own faithful," in recent years criticism has been levelled at the papacy by dissenting Catholics, priest and lay alike, for making bishops managers who only work under the papacy's instructions (Abbott 1967, p. 41). One priest respondent claimed, *bishops have operationally and imaginatively merged with the pope*. Fr. Luke cynically added: *the bishops are the pope's altar boys*. Reports of intimidation by the Curia have also surfaced. This inner circle of bishops within the Vatican is known for its subtle, but sometimes very direct methods of intimidating the bishops, requiring them to make certain recommendations that should not be made. "The bishops perplexed, keep silent, so as not to embarrass the pope or appear rebellious" (O'Connell 1996, p. 887). As a result, few bishops are able to pose safely formal questions about celibacy, that is, without sacrificing their positions. Consequently, bishops are pressured to ensure that priests maintain celibacy, cornering these clerics into a position of public conformity. Hence, with the support of God and loyal bishops, the papacy does not need to listen to the outcomes of research and the concerns of others because its position and power rests on the unquestioned acceptance of celibacy and the willingness of priests to sacrifice their lives to the priesthood.

The Sexually Intimate Contest

The papacy promotes the Eucharist as the means in which the "unity of the Church is both signified and brought about"; it is also regarded as "the source of perfecting the Church" (Abbott 1967, pp. 343, 626). In this view, and as Fr. Simon explains, the papacy regards *the Eucharist as a sign of "unity achieved" and, in consequence, uses the Eucharist as a moral judge of people's worthiness*. Consequently, when priests

celebrate and receive Eucharist, they are also acceding to the hierarchical order, which is dependent upon celibacy. Yet, such triumphalism may be illusory because it does not factor into the victory those priests who continue to enjoy friendship. The papacy's continuing insistence on the veracity of celibacy and other sexual teachings may undermine the universal Church's mission to "preach the Gospel to all men" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994, p. 225). After all, the same Eucharist that unites the Church may also be that which divides it, as will be considered in the following two sections. By refusing to see that a too confrontational view of local sentiment is dangerous, the papacy potentially creates grounds for schism.

Those priests, who contest celibacy, often express their dissent in the way they understand and promote Eucharist, which is in contrast to the Eucharistic emphasis on sacrifice favoured by the papacy. These priests are no longer under the hegemonic control of the papacy and hence, are now engaged in an ideological struggle over Eucharist and its implications for their lives and ministries. Fr. Simon contends, *the Church [should] see the Eucharist as a sign of "unity to be achieved" and, in consequence, [use] the Eucharist to foster community ideals rather than as a judge of private facts*. Behind this view lies an opinion that a priest should not be judged on whether he is celibate or not; rather, emphasis should be given to how a priest uses his sexuality, whether expressed in celibacy or sexual intimacy, to cultivate egalitarian relationships. This priest's view is similarly reflected and extended by Fr. Zac,

Jesus did not redeem us by dying on the cross for us, but that his death was the outcome of his beliefs and positions he took in his living of life. If Jesus can be said to have "redeemed" us it was by showing us the way to live, that we can work for the Kingdom fearlessly, even though the cost might be great.

Eucharist for Fr. Zac is about making sacrifices to pursue what is worthwhile in life, as modelled by his mentor, Jesus. In his efforts to achieve that integrity, Fr. Zac has no difficulties about his friendship in the face of institutional expectations: *I have no regrets about my rejection of celibacy as a lifestyle because I am convinced that it is contrary to natural justice to impose celibacy as a condition for being a priest, or as a condition for entering religious life*. In this priest's view, celibacy fractures relationships, and justice is not found in the hierarchical principal of subordination.

Friendships, however, which presuppose relationships of equality, are worth making sacrifices for.

Fr. Zac's journey towards integrity has forced him to deal with perplexing questions such as whether he should remain a priest, not because of his friendship but because he does not believe in many of the doctrines that the papacy expects him to promote:

I will not preach the official understanding of so much of the scriptures. [But] I am very careful not to disturb "the faith" of people. Yet, many appreciate the challenges that I am always making, especially the challenge to think. Many people have told me that I am the first priest they have heard talk about the scriptures as if they have something to do with human life and human living.

Fr. Zac actively supports and promotes alternative understandings of Jesus' teachings, and of the Eucharist, which subtly contest the papacy's view of social order. Thus, this priest rhetorically advances different beliefs and schismatic practices. Just as Jesus resisted pharisaic readings of the Torah, Fr. Zac also resists the papacy's readings of the scriptures. Moreover, Fr. Zac's resistance is being affirmed: *I have consulted a few people over the last few years and all have encouraged and supported me to stay in the priesthood.* People who desire religious relevance sustain Fr. Zac's ministry, which suggests that he is successfully speaking into the meaning of his parishioner's lives.

The experience of loving friendship has also shaped Fr. Matthew's understanding of the Eucharist,

Through our love for each other, I have been enabled to offer a God of truly unconditional love not just through cold words or black and white symbols but through an animated, integrated, intimate, personal experience and response in a richer and truer loving faith. I constantly thank God for the precious gifts of my friend and priesthood.

When I celebrate with the parish the Eucharist, I celebrate and experience the essence of intimate, true love.

For Fr. Matthew, God is a personally close and deeply intimate presence, an experience that he endeavours to convey to his parishioners in the Eucharist. In his

view, God puts no conditions on love; therefore, God is not impressed by the condition of celibacy that the papacy puts on priesthood, nor is God concerned with whether a priest is celibate or not. According to Fr. Matthew, God is ultimately concerned that a priest loves. In effect, this priest promotes the Gospel of Friendship by embracing the *essence of intimate, true love*, which is symbolised in the communal sharing of Eucharist.

Sacred Body, Sacred Bread

From the papacy's perspective the Eucharist is a key indicator of celibate inclusivity. Priests who remain celibate, according to canonical parameters, can celebrate Eucharist, thereby assuring their salvation. Conversely, those priests who contract intimate friendships cannot licitly preside over Eucharist and, therefore, endanger their salvation. Such logic is embedded in the official and social definitions of the Church. Yet, when listening to some of my priest respondents, they contend friendship compels them to conversion in which they locate new understandings of Eucharist. The following is an analysis of how one priest nuanced his interpretation of Eucharist. When Fr. Paul first contacted me, he indicated that he had not endured any particular hardship with celibacy and was contented with his practice. A few years later, a friendship with Sarah developed into a sexual relationship. For Fr. Paul, his experience of sexual intimacy was a revelation, which led him to reassess Eucharist in light of his experience:

With the Sacraments, it is touch and ... sign and symbol. Sexual intimacy is also touch and sign and symbol. The basis of the Sacraments is Jesus, their life and source and I think of the touching and physicality of Jesus. There is a difference with Eucharist. Before I can tell this, please realise that I was in my mid-60's before I ever touched a woman's breasts and genitals. What I did may have been the actions of a 20 year old, but I was doing this with the wisdom, knowledge, and religious attitude of a sixty four year old priest. This difference is important.

The first time we were in the bedroom, in the first week of January, she stood naked before me, and said, "I didn't give you a Christmas present, so I want to give you the best gift I can give you, the gift of my own body." This is Eucharistic – my body given for you. Kissing and sucking her nipples, with my knowledge and attitude of nipples as food providers – helped me to see a link with the spiritual drink of Eucharist.

I saw her vagina as sacred and holy and I saw my penis as a sacred holy part of my body and a gift from God, and in the giving and receiving I accepted it as similar to the Eucharist.

We talked about this, my friend and I, and we spoke about circumcision as the Jewish dedication to the Lord and the most evident sign of belonging to the community of God's people. Our love-making was our dedication and this was a mutual interpretation. Sexual intimacy helped me to understand intimacy. For Sarah, our intimacy was a healing gift from God.⁵⁵

Fr. Paul expresses his understanding of sexual intimacy through the meaning of the Sacraments, those ritual events that have manifested and celebrated God's presence in his own life and the lives of others. Sexual intimacy is similarly considered sacred, a divine blessing given to both Sarah and himself, and for the Church. Fr. Paul further considers that in both these important events, the physicality of touch is a visible sign of Jesus' physicality, for touching is an intimate experience that unites one to another.

Through Eucharist, the value and worth of sexual intimacy is realized in a unique way for Fr. Paul. By asserting his priestly seniority, Fr. Paul is saying that he understands sexuality in a way that a person of lesser maturity and spiritual development could not. His ability to grasp the meaning of this sacred sexual event has been forged from years of religious reflection and prayerful knowledge of Jesus. Thus, Fr. Paul is able to reconcile sexual intimacy with the immanent presence of God in the Eucharist. In the language of the Eucharistic ritual – *my body ... given ... for you* – Fr. Paul consecrates the gift of Sarah's body, which he considers holy, as he does his own body and in particular, her and his genitalia. He then metaphorically equates the nurturing and nourishing qualities of her nipples with spiritual food and drink, which Fr. Paul receives with thanksgiving.⁵⁶ Intercourse – *in the giving and receiving* – is also understood as Eucharist, a gift that bonds the two friends with God and each other. Moreover, Fr. Paul brings to the fore a communal meal

⁵⁵ One priest who read this manuscript in an earlier draft was uncomfortable with this example. Such discomfort, however, indicates the difficulties in constructing a shared understanding of how to talk about celibacy, given the official veto on discussion. Fr. Paul, on the other hand, and in the privacy of our discussions, considered this was one valid way for understanding his interpretation of Eucharist, which includes sexual intimacy.

⁵⁶ Eucharist is derived from the Greek *eucharistia*, meaning, 'giving of thanks.'

emphasis of Eucharist. This is not just a personal event, but also a sacred event that has communal ramifications. In Paul and Sarah's mutual sharing of sexual intimacy, they nourished each other: she, through embodied sources of life, namely, her breasts and vagina; he, through embodied care expressed through mouth, hands and penis, which brought her healing. Such intimate reciprocity and mutuality signifies a communal sharing in both sacred bodies and sacred bread.

For Fr. Paul, the act of lovemaking is another form of Eucharistic expression, which nourishes and deepens his and Sarah's membership in the community of God. Eucharist, in its totality, signifies heaven, an experience that already begins in this world, as is expressed in intimate communion where Sarah and Paul express their love for each other. As a benediction, Fr. Paul consummates sexuality with religion, making them sacred partners in the universal and eternal plan of God. For this priest, Eucharist, in essence, is now a marker for sexual inclusiveness. Through realigning the meaning of sexual intimacy with the immanence of God, he reconfigures social order, which he implicitly expresses through his public celebration of the ritual. Behind the façade of celibacy and in the safety of his intimate friendship, Fr. Paul is able to make the papacy's beliefs peripheral to Eucharistic meaning, while God, Sarah, and his parishioners are central to his understanding of this sacred ritual.

Difficulties and Dreams

If the papacy were to simply defer to its divine and hierarchical standards, it need not be unduly concerned about celibacy. However, hegemony is being worn away and consequently, behind this eternal and absolute façade, there are social dynamics that revolve around the well-concealed but ever-present instability of political entities within the priesthood. The volatility of ideological struggle has the potential to split priests into opposing groups or factions that would threaten, not only the uniformity of celibacy but also the priesthood. This possibility is currently being fuelled by discontent, as is signalled in a growing body of research and ethnographical evidence, which indicates a multitude of problems relating to celibacy. Included in this data is the rhetoric of priests who are already using symbolic actions and figurative language in the Eucharist to express their celibate-sexual struggles, which further indicates the potentiality of schism in the midst of priesthood.

The example of priests with friends does not offer much comfort for the papacy's ability to maintain celibacy in the future, as is additionally spelt out by Fr. Timothy: *there is a quiet groundswell of support for systemic change. We are becoming less willing to tolerate the present system, and favour a more open style of leadership where celibacy is optional.* While there is an absence of formal opportunities for priests to present their understanding of how God is working in their lives, combined with arguments about their difficulties with celibacy and the advantages and blessings of their friendship, it is likely that these contradictions will increase the possibility of spontaneous dissent amongst priests.

The appearance of dissent made evident by priests with friends in their interpretations of Eucharist challenges the papacy's belief system and hierarchical order. The notions of sacrifice held by these priests are in the process of shifting from "giving up" the possibility of intimate friendship to making sacrifices that prioritise the value of such relationships. Such understandings are further reflected in their comprehension of an emphasis on the interpretation of Eucharist as communal meal in which egalitarian commensality welcomes all, including those who currently fall outside the papacy's hierarchical order. This emergent ethic also suggests a nascent social order where Church members are not separated by rank but constituted in equity; each being required to coexist, cooperate and collaborate to form an inclusive community.⁵⁷ In this model of Church, the Catholic community would need to embody more pluralistic idioms of sexuality, which is in contrast to the papacy's version of a homogeneous celibate priesthood.

However, for the papacy, these divergent views, which are reflected in an interpretation of Eucharist as communal meal, have important ramifications. Firstly, the faith of priests with friends may have significant impact on negating any efforts to restore celibacy. Like the papacy's faith, such belief can ensure surrender of these priests' whole self to a particular vision of God, which cements a new and unshakeable foundation upon which to live and minister. Such faith is likely to cement difference into the religious, social and political foundations of the

⁵⁷ Theologically, preference would, for example, be given to the authority of baptism rather than to the authority of ordination; the converse being dominant at present.

priesthood, an addition that could create irreparable damage to the hierarchical order and its related symbolic system. Furthermore, faith is not confined to individuals or categorical groups; it is also a revelation that ideally orders the broader Catholic community. A diversity of beliefs that are at odds with each other are, therefore, likely to increase the trials and tribulations of the papacy in particular, and the priesthood and Church in general, until a pathway to the future is collectively discerned.

Finally, the papacy's ability to control and influence priests can only be sustained if local priests choose to continue to uphold its uniform policies. This research, however, suggests that due to the shift from a Eucharistic emphasis on sacrifice to one of gathering at a communal meal, the religious and social basis for maintaining the celibate priesthood as favoured by the papacy is fading. Furthermore, as priests continue to essentialize their friendships, these relationships become an unchangeable reality in their lives, which is likely to be reproduced. Thus, the expressions of disapproval by the papacy about sexual pluralism within the priesthood will not make the problem go away: on the contrary, the papacy's reiteration of the policy of celibacy may be the most threatening element in the entire situation. Reiteration only reminds priests of their insecure situation, and while they feel such discomfort, they will increasingly make up their own minds about celibacy and sexual intimacy. These priests are becoming less willing to sacrifice their sexuality on what Fr. Matthew refers to as, *the altar of power*. Moreover, priests with friends are also aware that the responsibility for the unnecessary sacrifice of priests' sexuality lies with the papacy: *Literally, lives are at stake, but they are at stake because of the hierarchical fear of doing anything to address the issues of celibacy for clergy*. Failure to acknowledge that responsibility is likely to create controversies that not even the papacy can imagine.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the hegemony of the papacy can be sustained by securing the meaning of a ritual and conversely, how erosion of hegemony occurs when that meaning is challenged. By constructing and mobilising a coherent belief system through an emphasis on an interpretation of Eucharist as sacrifice, the papacy is able to maintain hierarchical order in which celibacy for priests is held up as the

ideal. This mobilisation is effected through priests who give assent to this belief system. In offering sacrifice, these priests not only participate in the promotion of the maintenance of the hierarchical order, they can also restore and secure their own celibacy by resolving any struggles that might be entailed in its practice. Thus, by attaining agreement from the masses about a particular meaning and practice of a principal ritual, and in offering a way in which to negotiate their struggles through that ritual, a dominant social group is able to sustain hegemony and continue to enjoy its position and function in society.

Nevertheless, hegemony is never fixed. Erosion of this process can occur when the meaning and practice of a ritual, held and promoted by a dominant social group, is no longer accepted and upheld by subalterns. Changes in the Church and world have produced a situation in which priests with friends have withdrawn their active consent to the papacy's belief system and hierarchical order. In recognizing the ideological workings of the papacy, these priests have subsequently rejected the emphasis that the papacy gives to an interpretation of Eucharist as sacrifice. Priests with friends argue that their ritualised separation from the laity, although enhanced by hierarchical privilege and prerogative, is not worth the price of foreclosure to loving friendships. In their ideological struggle to reconcile their difficulties, these priests set about creating another set of hegemonic social relations that replaces institutional exclusivity with hospitable inclusivity. By using their priestly craft, these priests emphasise an interpretation of Eucharist as a communal meal, which subtly advantages their claims about the value of the love of their friends for their lives and ministry, ideas that can potentially reconfigure the Church's social order. When subalterns recognize contradictions in the meaning and practice of a ritual that is promoted by a dominant social group, hegemony is eroded. From that point, subalterns engage in an ideological struggle in which they seek to reinterpret the ritual and imbue it with new and relevant meanings and practices, which have broader social consequences.

A dominant social group in realizing there is a crisis of hegemony, seeks to reassert its control by quelling opposition. In demonstrating an unwillingness to sacrifice sexual intimacy to celibacy, priests with friends signal a substantial threat to the ideological policies of the papacy. In its anxiety over this state of affairs, the papacy

mounts an aggressive campaign that sanctions those who contest celibacy in either word or deed, and determinedly promotes celibacy. The consequence of these actions, however, results in increased social dissonance that threatens the stability of the papacy's belief system and hierarchical order because these strategies not only fail to overcome the problems that priests encounter at the local level, they also aggravate the difficulties that these priests endure. Thus, once the ritualised meaning system of a dominant group has been challenged, its ability to restore and maintain its beliefs and social order can become increasingly questioned. In the next chapter, attention is given to how hegemony is inculcated and then eroded in the broader Catholic context, an aspect of this research that aims to tease out the social magnitude of the disjunction between the papacy and priests with friends.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Social Organization of Celibacy

In previous centuries, the papacy appears to have accepted celibacy as part of the package of priesthood. Accordingly, priests gave general approval to a spirituality of separation and a hierarchical order that made them superior to the laity. In this chapter I first show how hegemony is made apparent when the moral understandings of a dominant social group are embraced by the masses. The papacy, in constructing a morality for the priesthood that is expressed in celibacy, has used various social institutions to mobilize its control in the broader Catholic social context. From birth onwards, the family and parish, school and seminary, socially formed priests in which they automatically accepted the ideal of celibacy.

Nevertheless, time has passed and changing circumstances have prompted some priests to reconsider celibacy. By recognizing contradictions in their ordinary everyday lives and ministry, these priests have formed friendships in which they seek to resolve their difficulties. The awareness of contradictions signals the erosion of hegemony, from which arises social disjunctions between the dominant social group and subalterns. This idea is subsequently explored by investigating a particular disjunction in this chapter, namely, the social competition between fundamentalism and hermeneutic complexity and fluidity. The papacy advocates a return to traditional principles as expressed in celibacy, and does so through official persuasion: first through its use of doctrine and canon law; secondly, through the policing activities of Catholics who are recruited to ensure priests uphold celibacy. Meanwhile, priests with friends, along with other categorical groups such as the secular media, priests who have left the priesthood to marry, and reform groups within the Church, consider that sexual intimacy is one important avenue that must be made available to priests in their ongoing search for meaning. In consequence, these priests with friends and others find themselves engaged in an ideological struggle with the papacy over celibacy and sexual intimacy.

Nonetheless, priests with friends, in their efforts to protect their priesthood, publicly uphold the façade of celibacy, thereby failing to recognize the extent of hegemony

working in their lives. The repercussions of this drift from hegemony to ideological struggle, consequences that are just as unsatisfactory to the papacy as they are for priests with friends, are then examined. Thus, I show how the papacy's fundamentalism is being undermined by hermeneutic complexity and flexibility. Yet, because this latter position is still formally and publicly anchored to the traditional principles of fundamentalism, a disjunction is produced, which indicates hegemony is in crisis.

The Genesis of Hegemony

The majority of priests who responded to this research were *cradle Catholics*, born into an environment in which celibacy was so accepted as being a part of priesthood that it was seldom cause for comment. Generally, they recounted similar tales of what Fr. Mark referred to as a *normal upbringing*:

I grew up in a typical Catholic family. [The] sacraments, rosary, prayer; they were very much a part of family life ... I went to a Catholic school, we had a Catholic doctor, when you get buried you get buried by a Catholic undertaker.

In this totally Catholic environment, social importance was placed on loyalty to the Catholic community, while individualism was discouraged and discredited, as acknowledged by Fr. Jacob: *I learned to put aside my own real feelings, and sought to be accepted by others ... and not cause them any trouble.* Deference was given to the bishop and priests, and their judgment was to be trusted on almost every issue. Within the parish, the priest, the brothers and the nuns acted as moral guardians and keepers of *the Faith*. Parents, who practised piety with their children, reinforced this loyalty and obedience to *the Faith* as Fr. Bartholomew contends: *Our home had a faith life. It was one where daily personal prayer was encouraged through our parents' example, and we said the Rosary most evenings as a family. God was no stranger in our home, and the Catholic Church was fully embraced.* That belief was further signified in the hope of Catholic parents that at least one of their sons would join the priesthood, because having a priest in the family indicated that a *family was specially blessed*. This pattern of early socialization was the norm for most priest respondents; the Catholic way of life was entirely accepted without query or doubt.

As children, these priests received *a full Catholic education*, and during this particular period, many developed a genuine personal piety, as did Fr. Matthew who acquired *a love of the Mass, the Blessed Sacrament, and a simple devotion to Our Lady*. These boys were also invited to be altar servers,⁵⁸ which often contributed to the germination of their idea to become priests, a notion which was further encouraged by their teachers. Fr. John said he willingly accepted his teacher's direction: *I know my vocation had its beginnings in this positive atmosphere and ... I was pleased to be encouraged and noticed by my teachers*. Often these boys felt that God was at work in their young lives, calling them to be priests, as was the case for Fr. Mark: *[it was] a gift, planted in my heart by God*.

Training for celibacy also began early for these boys. Sex segregation and celibate practice in the school staff suggested inflexible social and sexual boundaries. Nuns, for example, staffed the primary school, while in secondary school; single-sex schools prevailed in which religious brothers taught these boys. Sexual restraint was also directly enforced. Fr. Paul reported that *the brothers warned him about [girls], and there were all sorts of rules forbidding them to associate with the girls from the convent school*. These priest respondents, not surprisingly, reported that they really had no female friendships during that period; with some seemingly more interested in other activities as was the case with Fr. Joel: *everybody played sport, everybody was into study. So [girls] really didn't figure in [my] life*.

A small number of priests, on the other hand, reported that they did have girlfriends, but these relationships were strictly chaperoned by their families and the wider community. Fr. Peter summed up his youthful years by saying that he was *innocent, sometimes naive, now and again confused, often curious, but never scrupulous. I thank God that the adolescent turmoil of unruly feelings, masturbation, excessive pre-occupation with girls, mainly passed me by*. These priest respondents, but not all priests, reported a generally smooth sexual passage through adolescence, which was directed by the moral rigor of the Church.

⁵⁸ It was not until 1994 that girls were allowed to become altar servers at the discretion of the diocesan bishop, but more recently, the Congregation for Divine Worship has stated that priests are not required to make use of female altar servers ('Clarification on altar servers: Option preserved for priests' 2002).

Priest respondents generally stated that as students, they achieved high academic standards, and in a period where there was a high intake of vocations, the best candidates were selected. They entered the seminary, usually straight after they had finished school, and their choice to attend either a diocesan or religious seminary was often dependent upon those who had influenced them most. Fr. David stated that *some of the Religious Order priests who taught and trained me at secondary school, had a profound influence on me – their generosity, warm humanity, prayerful and committed lives, caught my attention and attracted me to consider their way of life.* Others joined diocesan seminaries, encouraged by uncles who were themselves priests, or by local parish priests who acted as mentors.⁵⁹

Having left their families, these young men entered into a regimented environment for a period of seven to eight years: *we always stayed within the seminary community unless you happened to be sick or needed some dental treatment.* Communication with the outside world was restricted: newspapers and radios were excluded, letters were screened by the rector, phone calls were limited, and familial contact was restricted even in the case of a family crisis, as was the case for Fr. Luke,

A couple of years before I was ordained a priest, I was called into the president's office ..., "Luke, please sit down." And I sat down. "Luke you have a sister." And he talked about her, and he talked about her having five young children, and then he said, "I'm afraid I have to tell you some bad news Luke. Your sister was killed in a car accident this morning." And then he told me the circumstances and then after we talked about it for a little while, he said very nicely, "Well Luke, I want you to consider this, I want to know whether there's any reason that makes it imperative that you go home?" I said, "No, Father." So, I went back to choir practice.

⁵⁹ Priests who belong to Religious Orders take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and normally share residence in religious houses. These Orders usually have a particular apostolate, such as working with the poor or providing education. While these Orders work in dioceses, they are usually independent of local bishops but this group of priests frequently work under the local bishop. Priests who belong to a diocese, and who are sometimes referred to as secular priests, generally work under the direct authority of the bishop of that diocese. A diocesan priests' ministry is usually directed towards the care of a parish. Church law requires them to make a promise to be celibate. These priests usually live alone, or with one or two other priests in presbyteries.

Within the seminary environment, these young men's lives essentially revolved around a regulated and monitored pattern of community prayer, study and exercise; several priests quipped that their *salvation [was] sports*. Clothing was uniform: black cassocks, black shoes, and white clerical collars: the colour black being a symbol of death to worldliness, inclusive of sexuality, the colour white symbolizing purity; indeed, celibate purity. According to Fr. John, *There was [also] a total absence of women. There were nuns there, but we were forbidden to speak to them.* Nuns seemingly were not regarded as women by seminarians. Seminary adages further underscored deference and uniformity: *be all things to all people; conceal what you feel; keep the rule and the rule will keep you.* Any hint of disobedience or criticism of authority, on the other hand, was considered anathema and a form of penance followed any deviation from the ordered norm, including *being showed the door*. Some reprieve from this rigor was permitted in the annual holiday of four weeks, but these seminarians were generally required to report to the local parish priest during this period, some of whom were expected to assist during daily Mass. They were also required to say daily their breviary and live up to other expectations that befitted a priest-in-training.

Forming close friendships with others in the seminary, relationships that were customarily referred to as “particular friendships,” were frowned upon. Fr. John reported: *If you were seen associating with one person exclusively, one of the staff would say that you need to widen your range of friends because it was perceived as perhaps entering into a semi or close homosexual type of relationship.* Strict rules also helped to ensure the anti-friendship code; for example, when going for walks, *you always had to go out in threes.* As well, *you would certainly never be found in a room with another person. If there was someone in your room, you kept your door open.*

The temptations of women were also addressed through other adages such as, *keep guard on your heart and you will not stray*, and *numquam solus cum sola*.⁶⁰ One spiritual director was reported to have advised seminarians, *If you see a very*

⁶⁰ A Latin phrase commonly used in the seminary, meaning, “never one (male) alone with one (female).”

beautiful woman and she tempts you, look around for her mother! Such adages reveal past thinking about man-woman friendship and intimacy in the life of a priest. This training was accepted at the time as necessary for becoming a priest: *I didn't find anything abnormal about it*, said Fr. Tom. Such opposition to close friendships between confreres ensured hegemonic control of these priests. As individuals, their sexual energies were harnessed for priesthood and their independent priestly character ensured there would be no banding together that would challenge ecclesiastical authority.

While the slur of particular friendships officially ceased to be part of seminary life after 1968, the majority of respondents to this research were trained, at least in part, in this atmosphere of caution. Their upbringing and training led these priests to uncritically accept the rules, as Fr. Aaron indicated: *[C]elibacy was irrelevant – then. I wanted to be a priest and celibacy was part of the deal*. Fr Luke further added: *[A]t that time, I considered that ALL sexuality was a no-go area for me as a man who was trying to live a vow of chastity. The initial decision and the earlier years were motivated almost exclusively by a desire to offer myself for service within the Church*. For these men, priesthood was very desirable, offering opportunities of ministry, status, and a lifestyle that they would not otherwise have had.

The Gradual Erosion of Celibacy

Newly ordained priests were generally sent to parishes to assist senior priests who, in turn, supervised their lives both publicly and privately. Often these neophyte priests experienced an initial sense of disappointment, as did Fr. Mark: *Eager to roll up our sleeves, and get right into the Lord's vineyard, we became, instead, the juniors at the bottom of the hierarchical heap, in the home of mainly elderly priests*. In this milieu, a new understanding of celibacy also emerged, and for Fr. John, *gradually the whole of what celibacy meant [was realized] – [it] was not consecration of your life, or commitment of your life to the Church and God, but celibacy brought about a sense of loneliness. And I think that is why I would start to fall in love and all of a sudden I would say, oh no, this can't happen*. Fr. Joseph, a homosexual priest, also commented that *two years after ordination, I had my first "in-your-face" encounter with my own homosexuality: there was another priest in the community who was quite clearly homosexual. My reaction was to run from the massive challenge that*

his very presence posed for me. For some priests, this realization of what celibacy can mean did not occur until later, as indicated by Fr. Simon who reported: *When I was in my early twenties and my early thirties, it was very easy to stand alone as an individual, without relationships, because our seminary background made us stand on our own feet. But without consciously seeking relationships, you suddenly find yourself developing closer and closer relationships.* These priests had been trained in the “good Father” image, loyal and obedient priests of the Church, but their experiences reflected a mismatch between what they had learned in the seminary and what they were encountering in their priesthood. The image of a priest giving total service was contradicted by consequences that had not been earlier imagined. Previously unknown emotions surfaced, including loneliness and sexual desire, sometimes leaving them feeling powerless and confused with needs of their own that they could not assuage.

These dilemmas were also compounded by a change in the climate of the Church. As mentioned in chapter three, the Second Vatican Council endeavoured to modernise the Church. Priests were now encouraged to be open to these internal changes and engage with the outside world but such a turnaround made it more difficult for significant numbers of priests to observe celibacy. Fr. Matthew, for example, stated that after leaving the seminary in the early 1970s, he gradually became aware of the massive exodus of priests from priesthood: *Guys I went through the seminary with were leaving the priesthood. Now I said, what’s going on? Why them and not me? You started to question ... not only your ministry, but [your] whole personal approach to life.* Furthermore, Fr. Matthew started to question the hierarchical order of the Church that he now considered *had an enormous bureaucracy, the Vatican curia – and I was expected to exercise that authority in the name of the bishop and the pope. So I started to object to it, revolt against it.* Fr. Matthew moved from a position of uncritical acceptance of priesthood, inclusive of celibacy, to a stance where he no longer believed in the ideological domination of the papacy. In effect, hegemony has been seriously eroded in the consciousness of this priest.

Fr. Sam also shared his experiences of these changes. As a seminary professor during that period, he *taught much the same things that [he] had been taught in the*

seminary but he was challenged by some of his students, which made me think more deeply about many things ... about some dogmas, and about relationships. Later, Fr. Sam lectured some nuns: *It was the first time that women became important in my life; they contributed so much that I could not have thought of, that complemented the things that I wanted to say. I had to admit for a certain wholeness in my life - I needed women!* Events followed, and he lost his *fear* of women: *I have tried to bring them into my life, knowing that I could only benefit.* Fr. Sam then met a woman with whom he *now enjoys a special sexual relationship.* Priest respondents experienced considerable turmoil in the postconciliar Church⁶¹ and continue to do so under the current papacy. These priests have been forced to reappraise their celibacy in light of their experiences and, consequently, they have shifted to a position where they disapprove of the way the papacy administers control and exercises authority in the Church, which includes the enforcement of celibacy. Furthermore, priests with friends seek meaning in their relationships, renew their sense of self-worth, alter their understandings of celibacy and sexuality intimacy, and realize a different understanding of ministry that, in effect, reflects a new social order.

Officially, Love is Conditional

Celibacy, however, is held in check by the papacy's endeavours to maintain hegemony in the Church and it does so by controlling its meaning in a panoply of doctrinal languages that serve as a pre-eminent symbol of the papacy's authority. Without regard to the viewpoints of priests who have difficulty with celibacy or have friends, and in refusing to give proper attention to the effects of its policies, the papacy uses crude stereotypes to essentialize celibacy. This is demonstrated in the document, "I Will Give You Shepherds," in which the papacy reduces love to its own basic formulation, which neatly fits into its pragmatic preference for celibacy (John Paul II 1992). According to the papacy, "without love ... life is meaningless." Such love "involves the entire person," and can be expressed in the "'nuptial meaning' of the human body, thanks to which a person gives oneself to another and takes the other to oneself" (John Paul II 1992, p. 86). In its rhetorical claims, the papacy asserts that sexual love can only be properly expressed in marriage. This view is reinforced by its condemnation of "a widespread social and cultural

⁶¹ A term that refers to the Church in the period after the Second Vatican Council.

atmosphere, which ‘largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure’” (p. 86). Sexual expression outside marriage is deemed unacceptable; it has no place in the hierarchical order and therefore, it cannot be attributed with any veracity or grace. Such a stance also conveniently sets up a circular argument for celibacy: priests are not allowed to marry; therefore, they are not free to enjoy sexual intimacy with their friends because such expression exclusively belongs to marriage.

Nevertheless, according to the papacy, a priest is required to love and be loved with an “affective maturity which is prudent, able to renounce *anything* that is a threat to [his celibacy]” (John Paul II 1992, p. 87) [my emphasis]. A priest can have a “true friendship” as long as it does not detract from his celibacy. Moreover, in the case where obedience to the papacy is threatened, a priest is required “to fight and overcome ... selfishness and individualism,” and as curative to the threat of sexual intimacy, a priest must submit himself to “to a suitable education to true friendship” (John Paul II 1992, p. 87). The papacy’s idiom of love is used to support celibacy, and *vice versa*, for in the parameters of its rigid moral construct, *anything* can include a priest’s love for his friend, and his friend as well. Thus, the papacy reduces a priest’s friend to a mere object, a thing that can be readily discarded, while his meaningful affection for his friend is discredited and dismissed. This dispassionate objectification consequently erases alternative understandings of love. Furthermore, the papacy denies that “true friendship” could exist within a sexually intimate friendship.

Unofficially, the representatives of the papacy offer blunt comments about priests who do not uphold celibacy: “There are some priests who, probably as the Lord said, entered, not through the front door, but through the back door. They were not really called to the priesthood” (Dowd 1993, p. 906). Behind the official façade, prejudices are unmasked in blatant condescension and hegemony. Priesthood, in the papacy’s view is synonymous with celibacy. Any other sexual state, regardless of whether a priest considers it is expressed in the context of a loving friendship, is considered deceitful and profane, a condition that ultimately invalidates priesthood for the individual concerned.

The papacy, moreover, adds weight to its official discourse of celibacy by using God to exercise absolute control over wayward priests. According to the papacy, priests with friends cannot be a divine revelation because these priests do not fit within the parameters of its own belief system. Belief, after all, is not based upon super-rational understanding but on trust that does not always yield answers. Celibacy is fundamentally located in the papacy's view that mankind always has something to learn about this practice and that no one knows it all or ever will. Hence, in the case where a priest suggests that celibacy should be made optional or that sexual intimacy is a grace, the papacy is able to criticise this dissident by asserting that he is "acting against the will of Christ ... [for] in reality, the Church as mystery is not 'ours' but 'His'" ('Church is His, not ours' 1991, p. 1). In effect, the papacy harnesses the divine to its own belief in celibacy by assuming it states the absolute and eternal will of God; the corollary being that priests with friends do not, for they have failed to plumb the mysterious depths of celibacy. Furthermore, when the papacy uses the strategy of mystery, it reduces the arguments of priests as incredible nonsense, and proffers in its place the ploy of arcane knowledge, which is unexplainable, inexplicable and secret. Only the papacy can know the will of God, which it determines to be celibacy.

Fr. David also identifies this strategy of mystery as a form of "*verticalism*," *[that] which piously ascribes anything and everything directly to God's will, to the excuse of our obligation to critically discern the signs of the times and attempt to discern what the Spirit is saying to the churches*. In this priest's estimation, the papacy's ongoing claim that celibacy is divinely constituted is a defiant act that ignores what the Spirit of God is saying to the Church through the significant number of priests rejecting its practice.

For priests with friends, the belief system of the papacy, which is wedded to abstract concepts of celibacy, is both insufficient and exhausted. Their belief system is formed in the experience of their relationships, situated in their circumstances of their lives and ministries, which yields thoughts, feelings, images and intuitions about the presence and guidance of God. Consequently, the papacy's "mystery" of celibacy and the subsequent rejection of sexual intimacy are entirely explainable for

priests with friends: it is about the papacy wanting to maintain vested interests. Meanwhile, the papacy betrays its unease about the situation it finds itself in: its excessive focus on celibacy has the potential to both encourage religious and social anxiety and undercut its universalist claims of uniform practice.

Canon Law and Celibacy

The Church operates within a system of laws that, according to Orsy, is defined by an “ordination of reason...issued by the one who is in charge of the community for the sake of the common good, duly promulgated,” which ultimately means in a hierarchical Church that the pope is in charge (1994, p. 106). Canon law is also said to reflect the social design demanded by God, since “it is intended for the community brought together and held in unity by the Spirit” (Orsy 1994, p. 107). Such law is promoted as having a supernatural character, where God is inferred to be both its original source and unequivocal supporter. In this collective scenario, the papacy and God are effectively aligned with each other, creating a powerful force that brooks no challenge. While, at best, these canon laws are said to benefit all in the Church, in reality they often serve the papacy, which imposes laws to protect and uphold its own beliefs at the expense of the cultural interpretations of the local Church and personal ethics, which include those of priests with friends.

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, celibacy is referred to as a discipline and, therefore, “not, indeed, demanded by the very nature of priesthood” (Abbott 1967, p. 565). Yet, the papacy absolutises celibacy in canon law, which effectively negates any claims to its superfluous character. Chief among these canons is

Can. 277 #1 Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, and are therefore bound to celibacy. Celibacy is a special gift of God by which sacred ministers can more easily remain close to Christ with an undivided heart, and can dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and their neighbour.

#2 Clerics are to behave with due prudence in relation to persons whose company can be a danger to their obligation of preserving continence or can lead to scandal of the faithful.

#3 The diocesan Bishop has authority to establish more detailed

rules concerning this matter, and to pass judgement on the observance of the obligation in particular cases (*The Code of Canon Law* 1983, p. 47).⁶²

The overarching effect of this law makes celibacy appear essential to the priesthood and as well, ensures formal observance and public enforcement. In consequence, the canon establishes a religious and social contract, in which priests and the laity alike are officially obliged to agree to uphold certain social responsibilities and duties within the Church. This canonically binding agreement promotes a perspective of religious and social correctness that pressures every Catholic to police priestly behaviours (as will be later analysed in this chapter), which ensures sexual deviance is locally rectified. Consequently, the papacy's purposes are fulfilled, for the law promotes celibacy as being necessary for social stability. Yet, behind this lies hegemony, for its legislators and those who make local patrols do not question the canon's validity.

At stake, are the self-interests of the papacy. Celibacy is, after all, the sexual border which lies between what is and what else, or as one priest put it: *If the church were to change the celibacy law, everything would collapse* (Rudderman 1999, p. 329). Yet, despite the best efforts of the papacy to restore hegemony, the crossing of social boundaries is likely to continue, especially in democratic countries where much of the impetus for reform of celibacy has incubated. Democracy has germinated favourable conditions for personal and local determinations and sentiments over universal values and the ethic of dominance, a political development that will be further analysed in chapter eight. In consequence, the emerging diaspora fractures the foundations on which the papacy rests its authority, which is embedded in celibacy.

While the papacy refuses to acknowledge sexual pluralism, the papacy will continue to be battered by the growing numbers of disenfranchised Catholics, subsequently creating structural weakness in the priesthood and the Church in general. However, given the top-heavy allocation of resources and power in the Church, it may require

⁶² Other canons relating to celibacy include: dispensation, canon 291; preparation for seminarians, canon 247 #1; prohibitions on loss of clerical state, canon 292 (*The Code of Canon Law* 1983, pp. 50, 42).

reformers to expend considerable energy and make huge sacrifices to bring about another type of sexual homogeneity in the priesthood that would restore structural stability. Meanwhile, celibacy continues to exist officially, but it is not the same celibacy that the papacy promulgates. Rather, it is governed by culturally relevant definitions that embrace diverse sexual behaviours in the priesthood, some of which could eventually become acceptable to the local Church.

The Responses of Dissidents to the Hegemony of Celibacy

The papacy faces an enormous challenge in maintaining celibacy, for the erosion of hegemony is also being fuelled by the secular media that is increasingly beyond the papacy's control. Before the 1970s, the film industry "seldom portrayed a priest in anything other than a heroic or saintly guise, and the best-known images included such near-hagiography as *The Keys of the Kingdom*, *Going My Way*, *Boys Town*, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, and *Angels with Dirty Faces*, all made between 1938 and 1944" (Jenkins 1996, p. 58). This deferential attitude reflected concern about offending powerful interests in the Church. Similarly, the media exercised considerable restraint in investigating or reporting news stories that involved scandals in the Church. To reveal a priest's shortcomings was akin to blasphemy in the eyes of diocesan officials and they were ever vigilant against such disclosures. These Catholic watchdogs also had the ability to exercise sanctions if the code of silence was broken, including withdrawal of advertising, loss of circulation, and revenue (Jenkins 1996, p. 63).

A change in media representations of the priesthood began to occur in the mid to late seventies. According to Jenkins (1996, p. 63), this change in media values was due in part to the influence of international media magnates who encouraged a shift towards sensationalist coverage in "tabloid" television news and prurient talk shows, which fanned peoples' interest in priests' sexuality. Once taboos limiting attacks on the Church were lifted, the media realised that reprisals were no longer as severe as they had been, and that exposure did not in itself conspicuously offend public taste (Jenkins 1996, p. 64). *The Thorn Birds*, the 1977 novel that was an international bestseller and which was made into a TV miniseries that proved immensely popular, further illustrates this change. The sexuality of priests is also the theme of films such

as “*Monsignor*” (1982) and “*Agnes of God*” (1985). In the 1990s, these sexual themes became more explicit as reflected in the film “*Priest*” (1995).

As well, during the 1970s and early 1980s, secular and independent Catholic newspapers began to cover stories of sexual abuse by priests and newsworthy tales about priests and bishops, especially those who revoked celibacy.⁶³ In 2002, the media has given massive exposure to multiple sexual abuse claims and the mishandling of these cases by certain bishops, which has further increased the level of criticism given to celibacy. These revelations undoubtedly reduce the mystique of celibacy, which further contributes to diminishing the social expectation for priests to be celibate. Inevitably, these revelations in fact and fiction damage hegemony leaving celibacy open to challenge.

Some Catholic reform movements also attempt to erode the hegemony of celibacy so that a new social order might be realised. One such movement is that which priests who have left official ministry have instigated. During the mid 1970s, some of these priests began to resist demands for silence and anonymity placed on them by Church authorities.⁶⁴ Each priest had originally believed that he was an isolate in his struggle to leave the priesthood, but as local support groups were organized, followed by the emergence of national groups, this sense of isolation gave way to an awareness that each priest shared in a worldwide predicament.

In 1986, the International Federation of Married Catholic Priests (IFMCP) was convened, which, in turn, successfully encouraged the organization of new national groups. These national bodies, as well as the IFMCP, publish newsletters to promote change to the law of celibacy, organize events, and create forums to promote their cause. More recently, the IFMCP has begun to liaise with other well-organized and well-resourced dissident groups, such as, “We are the Church,” “Call To Action,” “

⁶³ Emmanuel Milingo, archbishop emeritus of Lusaka, Zambia, married a 43-year old Korean acupuncturist, in a group wedding led by Reverend Sun Myung Moon in May 2001, which was widely publicized ('Ex-Archbishop Facing Excommunication' 2001). He later ended his marriage and returned to the Church, events that have been equally publicized.

⁶⁴When a priest applies for dispensation, the official term for permission to leave formal ministry, a priest is forbidden to be publicly involved in Catholic institutions, he is not to remain in the same place where he was known as a priest, and if he chooses to marry, he must avoid “pomp and display” (Rice 1991, pp. 82-83).

Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church,” “ Women’s Ordination Worldwide,” and “Comunita di Base.”⁶⁵ In networking with each other, these Catholics, priest and lay alike, are endeavouring to bring about a new homogeneous form of Church that is structurally decentralized, and which does not oblige priests to observe celibacy.

There are also individual priests who have left the official priesthood⁶⁶ and have found ways to creatively engage in the celibacy debate. For instance, former priests have published their autobiographies,⁶⁷ and used their professions to further the debate on celibacy. David Rice, an investigative journalist, for example, reported the global phenomenon of resigned priests (1991). Richard Sipe, a psychotherapist, published his study “based upon interviews with and reports from 1500 people who have firsthand knowledge of the sexual/celibate adjustment of priests” (1990, p. 8).⁶⁸ During this research, I also came across unpublished theses relating to celibacy that were produced by former priests.⁶⁹ The biographies and autobiographies of partners of priests are also in circulation.⁷⁰ As well, dissident theologians, many of whom criticise the sexual policies of the papacy promote their works through various media.⁷¹ The Internet further contributes to the wearing away of hegemony, by providing a level playing field for those Catholics who wish to promote their disparate ideologies. While the papacy also asserts its ideology through its conservative power by using these diverse media, it must compete with others in

⁶⁵ For more complete lists of Reform Groups and Ministries see <http://www.marriedpriests.org/MinistriesAndGroups.htm> (22/8/2002)

⁶⁶ It is acknowledged that some priests consider they have not left the priesthood, rather they have resigned from the narrower form of priesthood as defined by the papacy.

⁶⁷ Examples of autobiographies include David Mackay’s three part *roman a clef*, *In Memoriam J.N.A.R* that reflects on his life as a homosexual priest (Mackay 1995)(Mackay 1998a)(Mackay 1998b); John Hanrahan’s (2002) angry, witty and passionate account of life in the novitiate and priesthood; Jim Madden’s (1999) account of his priesthood, the founder of Epiphany, Australia, a married priests’ group affiliated with the IFMCP.

⁶⁸ Other examples include, Eugene Kennedy (1972) (2001), Richard Schroeherr (1993), and Heinz Vogels (1992); all of whom have published their research.

⁶⁹ For example, Alex Nelson’s (1995) research the role of imagination in autobiography and transformative learning in the lives of former priests; Denis Hunter-Papp’s (1988) study of the departure of Catholic priests from the ministry.

⁷⁰ The earliest known of this genre is “Forbidden Fruit” by Annie Murphy (Murphy and de Rosa 1993), which is her version of the relationship she had with Irish Bishop Eamonn Casey; A “Passion for Priests” by Claire Jenkins (1995) is a biographical work about women in relationships with priests in England.

⁷¹ Paul Collin’s (2001) “*From Inquisition to Freedom*,” lists seven prominent Catholics writers who have undergone examination by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, over issues that are directly or indirectly related to sexuality.

these fields. Thus, the contest over celibacy continues to ensure that, rather than being unquestionably accepted, it remains an ideal, one option amongst many that is promoted in cinema, print, television and cyberspace.

The use of the media by dissident individuals and groups has contributed to uncovering the stereotype of celibacy⁷² used by the papacy to such an extent that significant numbers of Catholics no longer give broad social approval to its practice. For example, in a six nation study conducted circa 1998, the majority signified that they would favour married priests: Spain 79%; Ireland 82%; USA 69%; Italy 67%; Poland 50%; Philippines 21% (Hout and Greeley n.d.) Other polls support these findings; for example, a written survey, mailed to Catholics in the United States and Canada, presented the statement, “I support the requirement that priests live a celibate life.” Less than one-third of the respondents agreed (Rossetti 1994).

With the revelations of sexual abuse in 2002, the papacy’s problem of maintaining celibacy has been further exacerbated. Once upon a time, the idea of reforming celibacy was so unthinkable that the Catholic population would not speak of it. Yet, once spoken, the idea has become more widely accepted. To some priests with friends its implementation seems inevitable, *not in the present pontificate, maybe in the next, but definitely in the following papacy*, as Fr. Jim suggested.

The Problems of Disclosure

Despite the breakdown in hegemony, priests with friends do not hold a position of ideological supremacy, for their attempts to explore different beliefs and construct a new social order are plagued by the restraints of canon law, and the practices that their confreres uphold. The following is an analysis of how hegemony discourages priests with friends from being open to other priests, bishops and provincials about their friendships.

When the issue of disclosure is entertained, sexual orientation is often the first factor considered by homosexual priests. Fr. Thomas became privy to such knowledge just prior to leaving the priesthood to marry. The newly realized status of this priest

⁷² The use of stereotypes is further considered in chapter seven.

attracted those who were burdened with the difficulties of celibacy. In him, these priests found a confrere with whom they felt it was safe to share personal aspects of their lives. Fr. Mark, for example, revealed that before he declared his homosexuality and preparedness to leave the priesthood, he had met other priests trying to deal with their homosexuality and their friendships. Fr. Thomas eventually received news that six out of ten of his ordination class had friendships and that half of them were homosexual. Fr. Thomas also added, *the more I speak to others in Australia and elsewhere about these findings, the more I learn of similar discoveries.* This was also verified by one of my priest respondents, who sat down and made a list of all the priests in his diocese. He concluded that more than half of his confreres, some of whom are homosexual, had been or were still involved in sexually intimate friendships.

In finally realizing just how many of his confreres were homosexual, Fr. Thomas then went on to explain the social pressures that force homosexual priests to publicly maintain celibacy; indeed, heterosexual celibacy, as argued by Fr. David: *[Homosexual priests] had to pretend they were heterosexual because the Church considered their orientation aberrant.* Fr. Timothy also acknowledges the pressure to conform to official and social expectations,

Having “come out” to my religious superiors as a gay man, I was quickly made aware that any trust they had previously put in me had evaporated – overnight, as it were. The ministry I was now to be engaged in was hedged around with conditions about, e.g., being in every night by 6.00 pm, not being given any money for bus/train fares, formal fortnightly reports to the local superior detailing what I was doing – and so on. My conscious thought was, “When my honesty and sexual integrity were not declared, I was given major responsibilities for administration and finance as well as great freedom. Now that I have been honest and adult in my self-knowledge, I am being punished/treated like an irresponsible boy.

In the priesthood, there is a code of silence with respect to the homosexual orientation of priests, which is used to limit the disclosure of information. The authoritarian social order encourages this secrecy and uses it as a powerful tool to isolate an individual priest, thereby suspending any possibility of formal support and overt compassion by confreres and others. Nor is the Church and the papacy, that are

responsible for these administrations, held accountable for their discrimination and treatment of these individuals. Therefore, they are free to continue to discourage homosexual priests from declaring their sexual orientation. Hence, homosexual priests are less likely to disclose their friendship because they are doubly handicapped by the dual standards of homophobia and celibacy.

Another factor a priest might take into consideration about disclosure is the stance his particular bishop or provincial takes on celibacy. One archbishop, for example, has made it known that if he hears reports about a priest having a friendship or a homosexual orientation, that priest will be immediately suspended. One of his priests, who does have a friendship, commented: *to speak out would mean priestly suicide*. Similarly, another priest reported that his bishop has launched a witch-hunt for any priest who might not be practising celibacy and further, any priest who was known to be homosexual *would be got rid of*.

This stance, however, is not universal amongst bishops. One priest, who shared some news of his friendship with his ordinary,⁷³ indicated that his bishop was also enduring difficulties: *he's paining too; he can see the pain of what is happening*. Not only do some bishops struggle over celibacy themselves, they also feel powerless to do anything for their confreres at an official level. These bishops consider they will not be respectfully listened to, and they fear being chastised by representatives of the papacy. Nonetheless, a few bishops do exercise power at the local level in informal and subtle ways. If, for example, a priest is discreet about his friendship, the relationship may be overlooked. After all, the issue is not what does or does not happen in the priesthood, but rather what appears to be seemly.

Behind this ruse, however, lie the pragmatics of *realpolitik*, which suggests that the shortage of priests and the fact of not wanting to lose experienced priests are two of the reasons why sanctions are not locally imposed. Another reason might be that these bishops count these priests amongst their closest friends, as is the case for Fr. Jude: *The bishop knows about us. He's not happy about it but he lets us be. He basically pretends our relationship doesn't exist, even though he is fully aware that it*

⁷³ "Ordinary" is the term given to the principal bishop leading a diocese.

does exist. By refusing to recognize his confrere's friendship, this bishop obviates the necessity for taking action. However, if the bishop did try to officially resolve the anomaly he would lose a trusted friend and an experienced parish priest – both valued commodities in today's priesthood.

Disclosure may also be inhibited by a complex set of dynamics. Fr. Sam, for example, made a list of reasons why he does not speak about his friendship,

- a) *Guilt*
- b) *Concern for protecting privacy/confidentiality of my friend.*
- c) *Sharing about my 'successful' relationships will only make my priest mates jealous.*
- d) *Sharing about my 'failures' will discourage and disappoint them.*
- e) *Others don't share very much with me, and so if I share my story they may feel pressured to reciprocate.*

The multiple responses of Fr. Sam are pressured by an overarching awareness of political conflict within the priesthood. The orthodox line of celibacy initially holds sway over deciding whether he should tell his confreres. From this perspective, Fr. Sam is conscious of wrongdoing as evidenced by his admission of guilt, and is further concerned that there might be sanctions levelled at his friend. This priest then responds to different priests' agendas by describing his friendship as both a success and a failure, which is a contradiction only if one group excludes the reading of his friendship by another group. However, given the problems and politics of sharing news of his friendship, Fr. Mark concludes that non-disclosure is a characteristic of the priesthood and chooses to take shelter in the culture of secrecy.

Fr. Paul contributed different reasons that pressure a priest's decision not to speak about celibacy, sexuality and friendship: *We've been playing golf for years and we never speak to each other about real concerns, about life, about how we're going, or the pain we're suffering, or about loneliness, or how we combat loneliness. We can talk about the football, golf or cricket until the cows come home, or other people, but never about ourselves.* The unspoken rules of silence and secrecy regarding their personal lives has been reiterated by priest respondents, with one priest offering an explanation as to why: *It is rather difficult to become good friends with other priests,*

for they were trained in much the same way as I; we never spoke of anything that was personal. Hegemonic forces of yesteryear, ideological pressures of the present, the negation of personhood (discussed further in chapter eight), and fear of sanctions appear to prevent priests from talking about their difficulties with celibacy.

Meanwhile, priests such as Fr. Zac, who have found the courage to share some details about their friendships have left themselves vulnerable to the criticisms of their confreres,

Some priests have really brought down the letter of the law. To them it seems that an intimate relationship would only ‘eat away’ at my priesthood. Then there are those who simply believe I am endangering the talents, gifts and blessings that God has bestowed on me. In these few, there is no concept of an enrichment of these gifts.

Fr. Zac is denied an opportunity to negotiate a positive view of his friendship, forcing him either to end the relationship or to foster it under a shroud of silence and a veil of secrecy.

In contrast, when Fr. Thomas shared news of his friendship with his confrere, he found that he was permitted to have a relationship, until he mentioned that he was thinking about leaving the priesthood and marrying,

... the mistake I had made was to continue what should have been only an affair. When I stressed that I actually preferred to marry, he thought it ludicrous that I would think such a thing. How could I abandon priesthood for that? How could I let myself be tied to someone who would restrict my freedom and “spend all her time talking about her varicose veins.” When I said I resented having to make the choice between priesthood and marriage, he was not interested in arguing the issue because the rule would not change in our lifetime. So his position was, I get rid of her and he would support me, or else I could do something silly.

Fr. Thomas found that having a friend was fine as long as it did not jeopardize his social status. According to his confrere, priesthood is to be protected at all costs regardless of whether a priest is sexually active, in a bind over the problem of being forced to keep his friendship secret, or desires to marry.

Other priests responded that they are very selective with whom they share news of their friendship, and even those who are privileged to know might *not know the extent of it*, as Fr. Tom indicated; or *are told only as much as I can trust [them] with*, as is the case with Fr. Paul. Fr. Peter also indicates that the issue of disclosure is one that takes time, and the degree of revelation is dependent on the reception of those with whom he might share: *I'm not guilt ridden with it now, whereas five or six years ago I would probably would have still been guilt ridden about it. It's a relationship that [some] of my priest friends know about.* Gradual disclosure has eroded Fr. Peter's guilt and helped him access fraternal support for his friendship. This priest also referred to his confreres having relationships, which suggests that the acceptance of priests' friendships is also reliant on networks of discreet like-mindedness. Fr. Aaron further expresses the need for careful discernment of who is to be privy to the knowledge of a priest's friendship: *I'm in a small sharing group of priests...but there would be a couple of members in that group, which I wouldn't talk about [my friendship] openly to them.* Likewise, a friend of another priest asked him not to share news of their love with specific priests, advice that the priest later appreciated as he came to know his confreres better. Secret cooperation, therefore, appears to be dependent on the local interests of particular and locally empowered Catholics, priest and lay alike, who carefully choose who can be told and who cannot.

The ideal of celibacy is maintained by many formal and informal rules that rigidly control what a priest says and does; hence, the majority of priests do not disclose their friendships. However, for a priest who does tell, he must rely on the continual charity and understanding of his confreres, bishop or provincial. Yet any disclosure remains risky, for sometimes a priest is unaware of the informal rules, or the level of attachment a confrere may have to celibacy, because according to Fr. Thomas, *[each] inner story is different, the rule of celibacy touches each [priest] differently.*

Consequently, bishops and priests who do desire reform of celibacy, they find themselves between "the Rock" and a hard place. They cannot afford to admit to the papacy that there are internal disunities. Yet, their refusal to acknowledge such fissures diminishes their credibility within the priesthood and the Church. Nonetheless, these clerics continue to invest in the rhetoric of celibacy because it is crucial for their episcopal and priestly survival - an action that is supported by

another informal priestly rule: *one should never crap in your own nest*. In refusing to *crap in* each other's nests, certain bishops and priests are able to maintain their privileges and prerogatives and their friendships as well. Consequently, official rhetoric, which is perpetuated by the papacy's interference in the local priesthood, helps lock these priests' rhetoric into a pattern that is formally denounced. However, without official forums that give fair and full representation to alternative views of celibacy and sexual intimacy, select bishops and priests will continue to contest celibacy, which will threaten the unity of the priesthood.

The Laity's Role as the "Pope's Policemen"

At the local level, there exist self-appointed custodians of priests' celibacy who are sometimes derogatorily referred to by priests with friends with such terms as *the Pope's Policemen*, *the God Squad*, *God's Gestapo* and, more recently, *the Taliban*. These parishioners keep watch over their local priest and threaten social and political violence if he fails to comply with their rigid expectations, as informed by the papacy, of how he should conduct his life and ministry. Such expectations are generally coupled with the maintenance of various self-interests, including religious security, social status, economic privilege, and political favour, each of which could be eroded if their priest's reputation is tarnished. Another characteristic of these custodians is that they often assume, or have intimate knowledge of, the everyday comings and goings of their priest. This privileged association ensures that they will have a share in the priest's harvest of rewards.⁷⁴ But such distribution is reliant upon their ability to keep the priest in a position that protects their multiple investments. Consequently, these parishioners use their close connections to substantially set the social and political order within the parish context.

Two examples of these groups are examined here, namely, the biological family of a priest and elite parishioners.⁷⁵ Fr. James lived in the same town as his sisters, Mary

⁷⁴ These rewards can include economic gains, social privileges, and an advantageous increase in status.

⁷⁵ Another group that could be examined is that of a religious community. A few priest respondents made brief mention of this group's influence on their friendships, but what was most revealing is that unsatisfactory community life was the reason why they sought friendships. One priest gave his view on the comparison between *families and communities...Family are blood. Religious communities are the luck of the draw – just like one's neighbours. Very soon you have the defence mechanisms in* cont.

and Martha, who constantly policed those who provided their brother with domestic service, and who came into his social and religious circle. They were none too impressed when an attractive, divorcee began to work in the parish and who later started to enjoy the priest's company on a regular basis. The sisters began to feel some anxiety about this situation. Their opportunities to enter the presbytery were gradually curtailed and they were no longer being listened to in the same way they had once been, whilst *vice versa*, "she" was allowed into his home, and he often sought her advice on parish and other matters. Mary and Martha became so threatened by the newly acquired friendship of their brother that they started to voice their concerns to others: *she goes shopping for him, she's being seen walking with him*, and so the seeds of disfavour were sown. Those who listened to the gossip also had investments in the current arrangement and so the "news" spread to such an extent that it inhibited the ability of the woman to work within the parish. Then one day, the constraint took on another dimension; the sisters and a few other elite parishioners approached Fr. James with the "problem" of his "affair." This was news to him, and not being able to get over the shock of such vehement accusations, he was forced to suspend the relationship with his friend. This restored his celibate reputation but the previous set of relationships with his sisters and other elite members of the parish could not be fully restored because the parish priest felt betrayed by their actions.

Mary and Martha were envious of Fr. James' association with the parish worker because it eroded their own exclusive position in his life. In order to gratify their envy, these sisters chose to use gossip to ruin the woman's reputation in the hope that they would restore their privileged position. By carefully choosing people with whom they might share, that is, those who also had an investment in protecting the priest's reputation, Mary and Martha were able to denigrate the woman's achievements and make disparaging remarks about her being divorced. For a while, the sisters felt a sense of power over their brother and the parish worker, and a temporary feeling of bonding with their listeners. But, in gossiping, they avoided having to face serious issues within themselves and in the group itself. The sisters

place, and it is soon obvious to all, where one's true community lies. Mine was usually to be found with outsiders (as I discovered it to be with my fellow religious).

did not ask critical questions about their motivations and prejudices. They also failed to speak to their brother and share their concerns and difficulties. The effects of their gossip were, however, disastrous for all concerned. Fr. James was forced to put on hold a friendship that he valued, and the ministry and reputation of the woman were damaged. The inter-relationships between the two sisters, Fr. James and parish elites became sour, which created unforeseen personal and social consequences.

According to Arbuckle (1994, p. 12), gossip intensifies in times of cultural upheaval or chaos. Once social order disintegrates, people are no longer clear about their identity and power and so they must compete for status and power. Gossip is one way for them to achieve, at least fleetingly, personal well-being and superiority. The current social disorder in the Church provides such an environment in which gossip can flourish. Gossip is used to maintain the *status quo*, which includes celibacy, inhibiting any justified effort to change the existing state of affairs in the Church. In the above scenario, such gossip discouraged the priest, and the celibate system left him unable to challenge the behaviour of his sisters and parish elites. Neither was he able to assess his friendship with the parish worker without fear of negative consequences. His assent to their gossip also made the woman a scapegoat. In consequence, everything changed, yet nothing changed, because serious questions about celibacy and the social relationships that it engendered remained unanswered.⁷⁶

Some priests with friends to whom I listened said they feel considerably constrained by what the laity thinks, as does Fr. Aaron: *I worry about what my lay colleagues know of my relationship.* Fr. Tom stated: *I treasure [my friendship] – but in [this] atmosphere, I feel so constrained to act in the “expected way” – I feel really dehumanised by it all – I can’t be myself.* Fr. Jonathon, however, spoke of the pressure the parish puts on him to stay celibate: *I’m living a celibate life because it’s demanded of me, not because I now choose it.* These priests feel they are being severely constrained and diminished by the expectations of the laity. Fr. Stephen

⁷⁶ This conclusion is highlighted by Gluckman’s (1963, p. 314) analysis, “When a group, even one with a united history, begins to fail in its objective, gossip and scandal accelerate the process of disintegration.” Given that there is an apparent lack of consensus within the Church over celibacy, such disagreement has a consequence in a breakdown of social cohesion.

also gave a concrete example of what can happen when one does not live up to the image of priest: *[one parishioner] saw me with a young man who works very unusual hours because of his job and he wanted to have chat. We went to a hotel and there was a cabaret, which was a bit noisy, so I leant forward over the small table. It got around, that Fr. Stephen was in a gay relationship.* Priests are anxious about the consequences of gossip on their lives and ministries, knowing that it can hurt their personhood and diminish the effectiveness of their priesthood. However, those priests with friends are also aware that without these relationships, their lives and ministries are impoverished. This leaves these priests with a burden of frustration that they are unable to resolve.

Yet, some family members and lay friends appear to be reassessing the intimate friendship of their priest, viewing it as beneficial to his life and ministry. This new perspective is frequently in tandem with their changing views of the Church, which is made apparent in Fr. Joshua's comments: *My friends don't see [my friendship] as being unhealthy. Of course, a lot of my friends would ... say go and get married. Even my family would say that.* I then asked why he did not marry: *I [like] ministering to others ... and I thoroughly enjoy what I do, even though I've got problems with some of the Church's teachings. The trouble with the Church is that it makes you buy the whole package.* The friends and family of this priest do not *buy the whole package* either and consider that Fr. Joshua would be well served if he were to marry his friend. Fr. Joshua goes on to say, *I would have a lot of stress taken out of my life ... [if I could] function as a priest and a married person. Just to have a friend or a partner on an everyday basis.* This priest contends that there is considerable advantage in being able to marry. No longer would he have to expend extra energy in keeping his friendship discrete, he would also see his relationship as being beneficial to his priesthood.

Fr. Philip also spoke of his family's attitude towards his friend: *My family of sisters got to know Mary quite well. They often stayed in her home when they came to visit me. My sisters recognized the closeness of the friendship and care Mary and I had for each other.* Some family members recognize that an intimate companion can provide mutual fulfilment in ways that celibacy cannot. After several years, Fr. Philip left the priesthood to marry Mary, and his comments about the reaction of his

confreres and parishioners to his leaving provides a reading of how celibacy is regarded in some dioceses and parishes:

I left ministry from a parish where I had served not quite a year. The reaction of the people, my community and the bishop did Surprise me for its level of compassionate understanding, [and] their sadness at my obvious pain. They were very supportive, and indicated they appreciated my courage.

... For Catholic people generally, the fact of a priest leaving is nowhere near the big deal it once was. People are just more open about these matters now. I have a folder full of correspondence; and in the many, many personal replies; there is only one that is angry and anti about my decision. Most affirm my personal freedom to make such a decision.

These multiple responses highlight the difficulties some local Catholics are experiencing with celibacy. These people, who have often been the conventional custodians of their parish priest's celibacy, are slowly changing the understanding of their policing role due to a complex set of variables that they have not previously considered. Celibacy is proving very costly because it is creating increasing tension among those who are ironically the most loyal and committed members of the Church.⁷⁷ These people who have often defended the Church for decades despite controversy, and supported it both financially and through other forms of involvement, are finding less satisfaction and insufficient returns for their policing service.

The papacy's position on celibacy is causing family, friends, and loyal Catholics considerable hardship, for not only is their personal relationship with particular priests being jeopardised, they are also losing quality pastors that cannot be replaced. With no concessions in sight that could restore harmony in their parish and diocese, the interests of these people may now lie in changing celibacy.

The Papacy: A Force to be Reckoned With

⁷⁷ Some bishops and provincials of religious orders provide settlement packages for priests to start their new life, and in the case of Fr. Philip, he was given \$15,000. However, bishops and provincials are not legally required to provide these bridging monies. More commonly, a priest leaves without any severance pay or superannuation despite numerous years on low wages.

The papacy argues its case for celibacy through a highly circumscribed form of anthropocentrism maintained in a hierarchical priesthood and constituted by a unilineal descent system that is officially regarded as pre-eminent in the universal Church. Yet, despite local difficulties, the salience of this universalising model demands a respectful reading. The papacy's heritage, grounded in tradition and religious authority, enables it to assert enormous control over the Church:

The papacy touches the moral and spiritual lives of millions of people through the pope's pastoral visits to scores of countries, his comprehensive teachings on doctrine and morals, his appointment of bishops, and his supervision of local churches. His decisions can foster unity in a multinational and multicultural church by reminding far-flung local churches that they are part of one communion. His decisions can also divide the church when he insists on teachings or practices that alienate and estrange portions of the faithful...As the leader of this constituency he is a force to be reckoned with (Reese 1996, p. 5).

In effect, the papacy's beliefs about celibacy have become the overarching directive that subsequently demands typification and conformity in the Church, and public agreement and submission by priests.

Meanwhile, collective responsibility for the celibate priesthood is authoritatively discouraged by the papacy. Synods, conferences, and diocesan and parish meetings are not officially validated as suitable avenues for attending to problems relating to celibacy and this topic is avoided by bishops and priests for fear of sanctions. Thus, the convention of celibacy is maintained whilst local expressions of sexual intimacy are subordinated, which enables the papacy's influence to continue to permeate the Church. Despite the consistent and studious criticism and popular dissent from celibacy, the papacy remains unyielding in its efforts to wipe out the aggravation caused by dissidents.

The papacy shrewdly uses various strategies to dampen the effects of dissent. For instance, the papacy occasionally suggests that celibacy is of secondary importance, "[Celibacy] does not belong to the essence of the priesthood as Holy Orders" (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). Then there are the extended periods of public silence on the issue, again suggesting the unimportance of celibacy. Yet, within the realm of

cultural intimacy, the papacy is deeply preoccupied with celibacy and related issues of sexual organization. The influences of secular media, dissident groups, and even civil laws have eroded hegemony, for the justice system particularly in democratic countries, generally does not trouble itself with non-marital consensual sex between adults. Once upon a time, these social sectors were allies and significantly helped to maintain hegemony. Now they have become ideological foes, which forces the papacy to redeploy considerable resources to uphold celibacy, both in monitoring the intimate practices of priests and mobilising defences to uphold its beliefs and ensure that its power and authority are maintained.

Threats to the papacy are not only constituted by dissidents' use of corrosive images of celibacy, but also by the laity's encroachment upon the priesthood. With the growing shortage of priests, lay people, including religious women, have stepped into parish administration, and married priests are known to discreetly fill the breach. Many of these laypersons minister effectively to the parish's needs but with the one exception denied to them: key sacramental ministries, namely, the Sacraments of Eucharist, Penance, and Anointing of the Sick. Consequently, certain parishioners, particularly those in parish positions of leadership, are calling for an overhaul of the hierarchical order. The papacy, however, has determined that this development is not in the best interests of the Church, or itself, and consequently expends valuable and limited resources to control and restrain these changes.

Such expenditure, however, results in Eucharistic famine, a ritual that significant numbers of Catholics desire and need. Furthermore, there is the loss of services and goodwill that laypersons are prepared to give but are prevented from doing so because they are excluded from leadership and decision-making roles in the Church. Yet, the papacy believes that it must withstand this massive cost in order to maintain its belief system; for it is aware, that without celibacy the entire hierarchical order upon which its beliefs rest is jeopardized. Fr. Ben echoes such a view:

The Vatican is not about to give away its allegiance to the cultic model – for without it, the very structure of the Vatican itself would be undermined. What man would crawl under his own home and dig out the foundations? Only a mad man – and that's how the Vatican perceives those who argue for a change in the laws governing celibacy and priesthood.

The papacy has invested heavily in celibacy and is not likely to abrogate this practice unless expediency dictates otherwise.

At risk, then, is the priest, who is clearly the victim, indeed, the sacrificial victim. For if the papacy's solution to the predicaments of priests over celibacy is to continually suppress a local expression of sexual intimacy in the name of an anthropocentric representation of a uniform celibate character, then the priesthood of the future will turn out to have a very old face. It is not a comforting thought. On the other hand, if change is to occur, because of continued local efforts, a great deal hinges on establishing different kinds of relationship for priests.

But the real test of priestly identity lies in breaking out of patterns of condescension, bigotry and discrimination; yet, unfortunately, these patterns are largely invisible and, therefore, all the more insidious. How many priests, for example, will recognize the menace in the common humorous digs at sexuality that I have witnessed on a number of occasions, one of which stands out in particular. I was invited to a priests' dinner-function and was seated at a table with seven other people, six of whom were priests. At the end of our meal a waiter approached one of the priests and said: *A lady is in the reception and would like to speak with you.* As the priest rose to meet her, his confreres chuckled and said, *Meeting with a woman, what will the bishop say?!* This innuendo suggested there was something sexually improper about this meeting.⁷⁸ Such a response, which plays the essentialist stereotype of celibacy, indicates how priests are locked into a seemingly inflexible grid that paradoxically subverts the goal of achieving a meaningful sexual identity for the priesthood. This behaviour also illustrates how hegemony is resuscitated and perpetuated. Therefore, it is paramount that priests consciously separate themselves from their celibate past, for only when they are able to claim the dignity and grace of being sexual beings can they hope to establish valued meanings for sexual intimacy in the priesthood.

⁷⁸ I related this event to a friend of mine who is homosexual, and he suggested that if this priest had met with a man, any homosexual priest at the table would have reacted similarly, but that his response would have remained private.

Within this social drama lay a further irony, for I was privy to the knowledge that two of these priests had friendships.⁷⁹ Yet, regardless of the disjunction between their private and public lives, these priests chose to support the official line on celibacy, which they promoted with jocular remarks about their confrere's *meeting with a woman*. While niggling feelings may have prodded the consciences of these priests, their actions sustained hegemony, thereby allowing the papacy to continue to publicly control and subordinate their sexuality.

Nonetheless, to break away from that form of manipulation is fraught with difficulties because the papacy refuses to allow public opportunities for these priests to come together to openly discuss issues relating to celibacy, and sexuality in general. Consequently, these priests, in order to continue their ministries and retain their friendships, maintain the façade of celibacy. Moreover, the papacy's prohibition does not only affect priests with friends. The papacy also refuses social support for each and every priest, for all are restrained from openly speaking about celibacy. All priests must, therefore, suffer their own private turmoil when it comes to dealing with issues about their sexuality.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on how the papacy's social and moral understandings of celibacy have been embraced in the broader Catholic social context, and then eroded by priests with friends' reflections over changed conditions, which has resulted in an ideological struggle. Attention has first been given to how priests with friends have recognized hegemony working in their lives. Through life reviews, these priests describe how celibacy was inculcated in them through various social institutions. Over the years and as conditions changed, these priests then recognized contradictions between institutional expectations and their experiences, and in an attempt to resolve these differences, they subsequently rejected celibacy. As a result, priests with friends have factored into their ministry different social patterns that they had not previously encountered thereby establishing a new belief system and social order that is meaningful to their lives and ministries. Thus, subalterns make personal

⁷⁹ Neither of these priests knew of each other's friendship even though they ministered in the same diocese.

and social comparisons between the past and present in order to recognize contradictions, which, in effect, erode hegemony.

In their resolution of contradictions, priests with friends have subsequently created social disjunctions between themselves and the papacy. These priests argue that traditional principles, as reflected in celibacy, do not provide meaningful answers to the questions that they draw from contingent and complex conditions. Priests with friends therefore assert that such fundamentalism needs to be replaced by an ethical standard that essentializes and reifies hermeneutic complexity and fluidity within the Catholic culture. As a counter response, the papacy has endeavoured to obstruct these competing rhetorics by formally controlling stereotypes of celibacy with doctrine and canon law, and informally recruiting Catholics to police the celibacy of priests. Through a rhetorical insistence upon a literal interpretation of these texts, conveyed and pressured through policing activities, the papacy makes a case for priests with friends to return to the traditional principle of celibacy. However, the crisis of hegemony is compounded by other subaltern social groups who have also created disjunctions, divisions that similarly reflect those of priests of friends, thereby adding to the papacy's difficulties and ensuring that celibacy and related issues remain the subject of ideological contention. The social recognition of contradictions is therefore not necessarily isolated to one subaltern group but affects members of other groups within the masses. Consequently, representatives from a broad spectrum of the masses seek new and relevant meanings because the belief system of a dominant social group is no longer perceived to be coherent.

Hegemony, however, is pervasive. Celibacy is so enmeshed in the Catholic belief system that priests with friends find themselves using this principle as cover to maintain their friendships, thereby unwittingly reinvigorating hegemony. At the root of this contradiction is the papacy that protects its investment in celibacy by essentializing and reifying the practice in doctrine and canon law; thus, assuming it alone has the prerogatives and privileges to negotiate celibacy. Yet, priests with friends and some laypersons are questioning the papacy's attitude that only it has the right to determine such a practice, for at stake is their own search for meaning. This ideological struggle, however, is confined to the margins of Catholic society, but it may well be the place in which the true test of celibacy is played out. If so, then the

conflict over celibacy seems to depend upon whether the local representatives of the papacy will give respect to what the priesthood is today or emphasise what it was in the past. This show of consideration also depends on the preparedness and the courage of priests and others to share their concerns and difficulties about celibacy. These are, after all, not issues for the papacy alone, and unless both these local processes occur, priests with friends will continue to search for meaning in ways that they have not been taught to seek; yet, it may be what will beckon them forward. Given that meaning is important to both the papacy and priest with friends, chapter five continues to analyse its significance from the perspective of morality.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Contest of Moralities

It is hard to understand why the discipline of celibacy continues in the face of so many difficulties, said Fr. Tom. Yet, despite his appraisal, the multitudinous sacrifices of priests and the serious erosion to the hegemony of celibacy, the papacy is able to keep celibacy off the official agenda of the Church by insisting that celibacy is a moral condition that has divine origins. In this chapter, I am largely concerned with how morality is negotiated and used in the priesthood and Church by the papacy and priests with friends as a means for positioning an individual in a social order.

The papacy has a total moral vision that is constituted by a set of absolute and eternal ideas about right and wrong. In this view, it is right for a priest to be celibate and wrong to be sexually active. Priests with friends, however, find the papacy's vision conflicts with their experiences, and so they endeavour to solve their problems by renegotiating the basis from which they derive their moral understanding. As a result, priests with friends also promote morality as a set of ideas about right and wrong, but these values are primarily constructed within mutually beneficial friendships that are situated in complex and contingent circumstances. In effect, priests with friends relativise morality as a strategy to renegotiate the absolutist moral position of the papacy with the aim of establishing their own moral vision as a meaningful absolute for their lives and ministry.

In order to examine this social process, I show how the papacy constructs etymologies to establish its claims made of tradition that are concomitantly rhetorical representations of morality. These representations constitute a total moral vision in which the papacy positions an individual priest in the hierarchical order. I then analyse the idiomatic constructions of priests with friends. These constructions contest and replace the rhetorical representations of morality used by the papacy with alternative representations drawn from their experiences in local contexts, which constitute a different moral vision. These priests challenge the etymological ploys of the papacy with alternative readings of tradition in which they contend that celibacy

is immoral and their friendships are moral. Priests with friends consequently position themselves in a social order that accommodates their friendships. By emphasising the local over the universal, these priests hope to factor their moral readings into a total moral vision that is acceptable to the Church. Features of this contest of moralities are then examined which explicate the terms of engagement for the papacy and priests with friends.

The Papacy's Use of Etymology

At the apex of the Church, the papacy contends that God's will, as expressed in doctrine and canon law, is the norm for moral teaching. The practical consequence of this belief is that the papacy has claimed the exclusive right and responsibility of giving moral guidance. However, the papacy also puts itself in the position of being ultimately accountable to God if such morality is not upheld by those whom it presumes to take charge of. This responsibility puts the papacy in an invidious position, for it cannot take into account those beliefs and opinions, experiences or practices that differ from its teaching. In effect, it has created a situation where the maintenance of celibacy is an imperative.

In the papacy's view, morality is supported by a set of ideas about right and wrong. It is right for a priest to be celibate and wrong to be sexually intimate. These representations of universalised and eternalised fact are, nonetheless, constructed by the papacy for the purposes of social inclusion and exclusion, which basically translates as males celibates allowed, all others disallowed. The papacy goes about making this moral construction by gathering together past and privileged claims of previous papacies. The alleged ancient status of these arguments authenticates their authoritative use by basing them in the seemingly unassailable bedrock of historical fact. These claims are then formalised through the solemnities of arcane scholarship that enable the papacy to declare that celibacy is a tradition of the priesthood: "The Church holds that the awareness of [celibacy], developed over centuries, continues to hold good and to be increasingly improved" (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). The papacy's selection of etymologies is then made definitive by placing them in official sources and in popular consciousness, subsequently reinforcing the message that celibacy is an eternal truth: "a gift of God to the church" ('Text of U.S. Cardinals' Statement' 2002).

Behind this triumphalist rhetoric are details of history that contest the claims that celibacy is a tradition. By unravelling these etymologies, a variety of buried derivations from an inert history can be disinterred. With historical contingency restored, an awareness of how the papacy has constructed factuality is made apparent. In the following analysis, I construct a rhetoric that goes against the grain of the papacy's selective argumentation by choosing three key periods of history in which celibacy was first established and then used to bolster the positions of respective papacies.⁸⁰ By treating these representations as contingent performatives, I will demonstrate that celibacy is not static nor an eternal verity but dynamic and located in the interaction between a papacy and priests in the immediacy of their social situation. Furthermore, by focusing on the constructedness of the claims made of the tradition of celibacy, I also argue that the legitimacy of official rhetoric can be challenged, which has ramifications for the current papacy that acts as principal moral arbiter.

From the time of Jesus and the apostles until the fourth century, the Church imposed no known celibacy-related restrictions on priests. According to Barstow (1982, p. 1), wherever we know the marital status of priests for the first four hundred years, marriage is the norm. From the second century, however, ascetic movements urged religious leaders to recognize the superiority of sexual continence that resulted in a desired and unique boundary of moral difference between Christians and the pagan world (Lea 1932, pp. 14-24).⁸¹ Brown (1987, p. 263) writes: "Lacking the clear ritual boundaries provided in Judaism by circumcision and dietary laws, Christians tended to make their exceptional sexual discipline bear the full burden of expressing the difference between themselves and the pagan world." By the third century, parallels between the Christian priesthood and the Jewish priesthood were assumed to exist, which required priests to observe ritual purity in perpetual continence for daily altar service (Brown 1988, p. 144).⁸² Zealots pressured for legislation to

⁸⁰ These three periods are commonly referred to in secondary literatures, for example, Malone (1993), Frazee (1988), Crosby (1996).

⁸¹ The cult of virginity and powerful groups such as the Endcratites, Montanists, and Manichaeans believed salvation could only be attained through sexual continence.

⁸² The ritual purity arguments were based in Jewish law. Through a primitive medical outlook, the Jews believed that any bodily discharges, including semen, required a formulated period of isolation cont.

insure their purity demands were upheld and at the local Council of Elvira, circa 305, a canon was enacted that required that “all concerned in the ministry of the altar should maintain entire abstinence from their wives under pain of forfeiting their positions” (Lea 1932, pp. 30, 42).

In 324, Constantine made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. With the end of Roman persecution, martyrdom became obsolete, and was replaced with sexual renunciation, a new form of sacrifice⁸³ (Beaudette 1998, p. 31). Consequently, priests were pressured to become the leading moral exemplars, reflecting the ideal for Christianity in celibacy. At this time, priesthood also became a privileged position that offered substantially increased temporal advantages. The papacies of Damasus I (366-384) and Siricius (384-399) were keen to regulate the sexual behaviours of priests to uphold the moral reputation of the priesthood, as well as to safeguard the growing wealth of the Church, which was under clerical control.

The Church was also daily receiving vast accessions of property from the pious zeal of its wealthy members, the deathbed repentance of despairing sinners, and the munificence of emperors and prefects. Such acquisitions, however, were exposed to a greater risk of depreciation when the priests in charge of these riches had families to provide for. To avert this decrease in assets, priests were simply relieved of their paternity (Lea 1932, p. 43). The papacies initiated programs to ensure priests maintained sexual continence and thereafter, canonical injunctions against sexual relations within priests’ marriages multiplied (Lea 1932, pp. 44-45). Nonetheless, these and consecutive papacies had limited jurisdiction, and without the means to implement these standards, the practice of sexual continence was limited.

The second period of concentrated efforts to impose celibacy occurred in the Middle Ages. Between 800 and 1000, Europe experienced cultural and civil upheaval. The Church also underwent a period of widespread corruption and new factors such as imperial interference, noble factionalism and simony regulated the priesthood. Such

from ritual service (Farley 1990, p. 68). From this understanding, Christians of this era asserted that that since Jewish priests were required to observe this state of purity, so too were Christians priests.

⁸³ Commonly referred to as white martyrdom, white being a symbol of virginal purity implying here sexual sacrifice. This is distinct from red martyrdom, which signifies bodily sacrifice

activity fuelled a reform movement that in part envisaged remedy by way of a celibate clergy. Centralization of papal authority was considered the answer to the Church's problems. A succession of determined papacies, referred to as the Gregorian reform, endeavoured to reorganize the priesthood by stressing papal primacy and the requirement that bishops were to enforce the papacy's decrees (Beaudette 1994, pp. 195-220).

The Gregorian reform was significantly assisted by reformers who re-emphasised ritual purity in the administration of Eucharist. Accordingly, priests that stood by the altar were a race apart from the laity, which required them to uphold the greater moral integrity of celibacy in the sacerdotal order (Brooke 1994, p. 226). With this theological premise established, priestly marriage was subsequently denounced as not only illicit but invalid. At the Second Lateran Council (1139) the first universal law of celibacy was passed, which required priests to give up their wives.⁸⁴ To ensure the law was observed, regulations were reiterated in 1179 at the Third Lateran Council with an added penalty for non-compliance: loss of ministry and all related and accrued revenue. At the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), Innocent III (1160-1216) supplemented the previous legislation with a canonical ruling that provided for the removal of priests guilty of sexual incontinence. Ecclesiastical authorities that maintained the services of such priests also incurred the same sanction but the law was unable to win general acceptance (Lea 1932, pp. 178, 206-9, 268).

Despite legislation, the canon continued to be flouted and by the fifteenth century, significant numbers of priests had 'wives' and families (Johnson 1976, p. 269).⁸⁵ During this period, generally known as the Renaissance, there was a revival of classical art, literature and learning, which made Europeans rethink their relationships with God and each other. The rise of national states, the discovery of the New World, the invention of the printing press and Copernican theory also threatened to displace the temporal and spiritual supremacy of the papacy. Within

⁸⁴ These decrees of celibacy provoked violent responses in many parts of the Church; with papal messengers being maltreated, imprisoned and even burned (Barstow 1982, p. 133).

⁸⁵ The flouting of the law also extended to popes. Between 1484 and 1585, six popes fathered children (Kelly 1988).

the Church, diverse factors contributed to instability, including financial abuses of ecclesiastical taxes that placed heavy burdens on priests and the laity.

The arguments of reformers such as Luther further weakened the papacy's credibility. These reformers insisted that since Eucharist was not a sacrifice (Calvary cannot be repeated), there was no need for a cultic priesthood, which abrogated celibacy. The convergence of these complex forces precipitated reform movements that moderated or dismissed ecclesiastical tradition, emphasised the pastoral dimensions of priesthood, and repudiated celibacy. To counter these challenges, Pope Paul III (1534-1549) convened the Council of Trent (1545-1562). This Council re-asserted papal authority, re-iterated the ban on marriage for priests, and reinforced the cultic dimensions of the priesthood, which also ensured that benefices and other revenues were kept within the Church. Later, mandatory and uniform seminary formation was introduced that set priests further apart from the laity: boys and young men were chosen for the priesthood and isolated from the world, shaped and locked into a cultic and sacramental vision of priesthood. Ritual purity emphasised belief in the superiority of celibacy, which could now be rigorously administered by the papacy, a pattern that ostensibly remained for the next four centuries except where the control of a particular papacy was weakened.⁸⁶

Key political forces that have shaped each papacy's construction of celibacy have been identified in this disinterment of history. In each period, respective papacies have been prompted by religious motivations and material conditions to control the sexuality of priests, subsequently restoring the exclusive moral authority of the papacies and protecting the Church's wealth. These canons, however, have been consistently and constantly challenged by priests through their protests, relationships, and sexual practices, and it is only when the papacies have exercised tight social control that priests have observed celibacy.

⁸⁶ For example, Gallicanism, a French movement against centralized papal control, pressured for legislation that no profession could debar a person from marriage. This split the French clergy; because marriage was considered a pledge of national loyalty and celibacy a silent protest against the new regime (Lea 1932, pp. 531, 535-38).

These historical details consequently challenge the claims of tradition made by the current papacy: “It was not merely the consequence of a juridical and disciplinary fact: it was the growth of the Church’s realization of the appropriateness of priestly celibacy” (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). This claim of “appropriateness” is, however, disputed by a substantial number of priests throughout history who have not upheld celibacy. Furthermore, previous papacies, particularly those from the fourth century onwards, and the current papacy have instituted and maintained canons by marginalizing and demonising those priests that have challenged the validity of formal claims made of celibacy. In effect, these papacies have erased the moral viewpoints of these priests and the veracity of their lives from the annals of official history. This historical evaluation, therefore, contests the constative utterances of the papacy, which ignore the social conditions under the production of its discourse. The current papacy, in instituting canons for celibacy and then insisting this practice has always been the norm, renders its argument of tradition prejudicial.

Multiple Claims Made of Tradition

During my fieldwork, no priests suggested outright that celibacy is not a tradition of the Church. This view, however, is understandable given that they have received the teaching in a hegemonic environment, have not been privy to buried history, and have used this notion to uphold their original commitment to celibacy. However, priest respondents criticised the absolute nature of the moral claims made by the papacy. Fr. Samuel for instance, considers, *[celibacy] had a use for a time and place, but it has outlived that usefulness and now we have to put it aside*. Fr. Peter also recognizes the ambiguity of the papacy’s claims: *For hundreds of years tradition in the Church has encompassed both optional and obligatory celibacy. It all depends on which era you want to base your argument*. Fr. David contends the argument for celibacy as a tradition *is convincing only if we believe that history is always progressive and the church can never regress in ideas and practices. There are, sadly, numerous instances that contradict this hypothesis. Tradition, then, is no sure validation*. Meanwhile, Fr. Mark calls for the reassessment of the moral value of celibacy: *Jesus reminds us [that] moral laws are intended to serve the needs and well-being of people, [and] when a moral law stands in the way of doing the loving thing for a person that rule loses its power*. Fr. James adds to his confrere’s argument by asserting the inappropriateness of celibacy for today’s priests: *we live in*

a very couple-oriented society; the celibate life is no longer considered a greater calling than the married state. These priests argue that a claim that is not substantiated by history cannot be put forward as an absolute and, therefore, the claims made of tradition by the papacy for celibacy are specious.

Priest respondents also gave reasons why they thought the papacy continues to maintain celibacy,

The reason behind the official stonewalling on the law about celibacy probably has little to do with doctrine since there is, in fact, no doctrinal obstacle to a married clergy, but rather to the fact that a married clergy would cost more than a celibate one, and also be less amenable to episcopal control in matters such as transfers. Money and power may have more to do with the law on celibacy than doctrine or tradition (O'Sullivan 1994, p. 12).

This priest recognizes similar control mechanisms that have emerged in the historical analysis, which suggests that the current papacy's agenda is not dissimilar to previous papacies. Fr. James also reiterates his confrere's position: *The Church doesn't want to pay for a guy with a wife and kids. Neither could they move them around as easily because of the kids' schooling or the wife's job, all the practicalities or difficulties that become part of a team of people.* Fr. James argues that, by avoiding everyday realities through not having to consider the personal relationships of priests, the papacy is able to divest priests of potentially competitive loyalties and responsibilities that might deflect from the Church. Consequently, the papacy secures and maintains a permanent, committed and cheap form of labour. Furthermore, in controlling the sexuality of priests, the papacy is able to sustain its moral authority and protect Church wealth. In effect, these priests recognize a contradiction in the papacy's universal emphasis and their local experiences. Priests with friends are responsive to the ordinary rhythms of life and contend that the papacy should accommodate these realities in the moral vision of the Church.

Moreover, Fr. Thomas considers that the claims made of tradition by the papacy has negative consequences for priests,

At the bottom of the line, I have had all these guys who have

played an important part in my spiritual, cultural and academic formation but the sexual aspects were deficient. When I look back, most of those guys were doing the very best they could and they would be so disappointed now to hear me reflect on that. But we have inherited hundreds of years of clericalism and that just takes a terrible, terrible toll because clericalism is power out of control, consequently, it is against the Gospel: "It is not how it is to be amongst you" [Mt. 20: 26]

According to Fr. Thomas, the utilization of clericalism by the papacy to control the sexuality of priests is a false use of tradition, which has deleterious effects on the lives of priests. Thus, priests with friends contend an emphasis on the universal morality at the expense of a local morality, as reflected respectively in ahistorical and historical readings, will continue to result in the questioning of the papacy's moral authority because it fails to resolve the difficulties that arise from these contradictions.

The Moral Status of Eternal Verities

In order to treat celibacy as a system of absolute values in which the relativism of celibacy is transformed into a set of eternal verities, the papacy must harness the idea that celibacy is natural to the priesthood, and that it conveys supernatural means. However, in order to make credible these claims, the papacy must take mutually incompatible propositions and present these paradoxes as mutually reinforcing statements, namely, that celibacy is synonymous with priesthood and likewise, celibacy and the divine are equivalent. Furthermore, such rhetoric must be intellectually credible, spiritually compatible, and able to symbolically mediate and resolve both universal and local contradictions in the lives of priests. Moreover, the papacy must constantly promote these abstract notions as being a super/natural⁸⁷ binary of priesthood, which is situated over and above a plethora of other abstract codes. To make this construction, the papacy privileges the arbitrary by literalizing these abstract notions: celibacy as a signifier is mistaken for the signified priesthood and the transcendent. As a result, celibacy becomes synonymous with priesthood and related to the divine.

⁸⁷ The use of the term "super/natural" indicates the idea that natural and supernatural are both implied.

In harnessing celibacy to the divine, the papacy is able to access a divine source of power, which it needs to overcome those who oppose celibacy. Nevertheless, the papacy must take this literalizing strategy one step further because the super/natural does not always favour its interests in celibacy. Consequently, those priests who keep *the Faith* are celibate and perceived by the papacy to be virtuous, while those priests who escape the literal boundaries are considered sinners who have given into the Devil. This suggests that the underlying opposition is not solely between celibacy and sexual intimacy, but between the more inclusive categories of super/natural-as-celibacy=super/natural-as-good and conversely, super/natural-as-sexual=super/natural-as-evil. This distinction underlies the papacy's rhetoric of celibacy and it is on such a basis that it ultimately claims its authority over issues of morality. Such an arbitrary stance is promulgated as being a moral formation that renders all other sexual constructions as subordinate and sinful, thereby ensuring that exact conformity in celibacy is forced upon all priests.

This fixity, however, can create genuine difficulties and embarrassments. Within the American priesthood, perhaps as many as half of priests are engaged in sexual relationships and in other countries, studies confirm that significant numbers of priests are sexually active at some point in their lives (Sipe 1990; Rice 1991; Kotze 1994, pp. 354-55; 'The Church in the World' 2003, p. 28).⁸⁸ Other ambiguities also exist, such as the admission of married priests from the Anglican and Lutheran Churches into the priesthood. These exemptions, according to Fr. Jim, have left priests *angry and bewildered at the double standards*. On the other hand, a very few Catholic married men are being ordained providing they refrain from sexual intercourse with their wives.⁸⁹ Fr. Tom also contends that this turn of events *makes*

⁸⁸ Kotze (1994, pp. 354-55), in his unpublished research on South African priests, found that "40.5% per cent of priests had, at sometime in the two years before the study, engaged in "casual sexual encounters", 43.1 per cent of priests were involved in "a love relationship" and 37.7 per cent had recently "ended love relationships". 'The Church in the World' (2003, p. 28) reports that a "poll showed that more than 50 per cent of Swiss priests did not observe the celibacy rule; 91 of the priests investigated were still in office; 35 had more than one affair; 207 were diocesan priests and 92 of the priest were members of religious orders; 11 had not told the women concerned where they worked; and only 75 of these affairs had ended in marriage."

⁸⁹ The papacy approved the ordination of two Brazilian men "as long as they gave up sexual intercourse." The Vatican issued a statement that listed conditions for "a dispensation from the impediment of the marriage bond in view of ordination to the priesthood": "total separation from the wife in the matter of cohabitation; acceptance of celibacy; written consent of the wife and children (if any)" (Fiedler and Rabben 1998, pp. 130-31).

the teaching about the sanctity of marriage hollow and insincere and it takes the soul out of celibacy. Such embarrassments ensure that the papacy's control over priests is significantly diminished, which consequently tarnishes its role as moral arbiter.

The Immorality of Celibacy

Across the priestly spectrum, the rhetoric of celibacy is diversely expressed. Two priests who responded to this research emphatically supported celibacy. They clearly identified with a notion of Church that is universal and unchanging, and within this environment, they argue that priests should remain celibate. In this modern worldview, the individual priest is subordinated and the historical and social context is waived; hence, the meaning of celibacy is established before life itself. Moreover, these priests did not indicate a willingness to be open to the views and experiences of celibacy and sexual intimacy of other priests. For these reasons I have not chosen to pursue their arguments, which are clear-cut and straightforward and therefore reduce the issue.⁹⁰

Most priest respondents, however, had definite views about the immorality of celibacy although several priests stated that because of a personal decision, they were relatively content and committed to living celibacy: *God has placed a no parking sign across my forehead*, quipped Fr. Aaron. Yet, these priests are concerned for other priests who are suffering because of the model of Church the mandate implies, and the credibility of celibacy itself as Fr. Tom contends: *The celibacy law has to go if celibacy is to retain its value as a way of Christian service.* Conversely, priest respondents thought that diocesan priests should be free to marry, although Fr. Philip humorously argues: *Marriage is fine, as long as they don't make it mandatory!*

Some priests respondents to whom I listened, also consider that in the case of homosexual priests, they should be allowed to take a partner because, as Fr. Joe says, *they struggle and have just the same needs as we do.* The need for intimacy, and the freedom to be able to express that in a sexual manner within friendship, according to these priests, should not be precluded because of sexual orientation. Fr. Stephen, who has a serious medical condition also considers that *an intimate and ongoing*

⁹⁰Limited amounts of material received from these priests during fieldwork is used on a few occasions to provide contrast to facilitate analysis.

relationship with someone else would not only help us relate and minister to our parishioners, it would also help when we have personal needs that require care. Fr. Joel maintains a married priesthood is a *fait accompli*: *What happens when some day husbands, wives and children run through the passages of the presbytery. Surely, it will change the dynamics of the church's understanding of itself, its teachings and so forth. In fact, celibacy will be looked on with some suspicion.* These priests assert arguments through an articulation of their local and multiple experiences that aim to persuade others of the necessity for the reform of celibacy.

A small number of priest respondents consider that religious priests should remain celibate because this group generally lives in community, and sexually intimate friendship in this context could pose a threat to group cohesion. Fr. Bart, a provincial of a religious order, however, concedes that, *some might revise their preferences if they knew that marriage was an option for the diocesan priesthood, which would make it a more attractive option.* When I asked him if this was the general position of those in religious orders, Fr. Bart responded: *a number of older priests would see clerical celibacy as, not only a sine qua non for religious priests, but would also see it as a sine qua non for priesthood generally. In the middle years and the younger years, they would be more likely to see a married priesthood as a possibility.* Younger generations, according to this provincial, have a distinctly different moral attitude towards celibacy than their older confreres. Meanwhile, Fr. Tom, a religious priest, contends that it is unethical to reduce a religious order's vision of priesthood to celibacy: *We need communities, whose members are single, single vowed to chastity, and married people, from which a priest would be chosen regardless of his marital status.* Priests who seek reform in religious orders express a wide range of rhetorics, all of which challenge the papacy's singular rhetoric of celibacy.

The moral evaluations of priest respondents are not concerned with assessing an *a priori* celibate character of the priesthood, as implied by the papacy. Rather, most of these priests exercise an historical consciousness that takes into account personal and social considerations. These priests belong to a shifting and fragmentary world and as a result, the boundaries of celibacy are constantly subject to continual readjustment and re-evaluation. This is in contrast to the papacy that uses celibacy in

abstract form to fix the boundaries of the priesthood in perpetuity. This difference in understanding consequently creates contradictions for those priests I interviewed because they are required to locate the papacy's abstraction in their ordinary everyday lives. Fr. Mark considers this a difficult task: *We are busting our guts to put into practical terms what the bishops, cardinals and pope decide. They hardly have to live out the reality. Whereas we, the underclass, the priests who are the lower class, have to grapple with the reality.*

Fr. Jesse considered celibacy not only problematic but also surreal: *What would we be doing if we weren't expending so much energy contesting an unreality or coping with a reality in an environment of unreality?* Meanwhile, Fr. Joseph believes celibacy is contrary to justice,

Some ten years ago now I was on a sabbatical overseas, and because of things I read and heard, I came to be convinced that the imposition of celibacy as a pre-requisite for priesthood was an injustice. No one has the right or the power to take away from anyone what is a fundamental human right. If someone wishes to be celibate for the right reasons, I would applaud that. But to make celibacy a condition of priesthood is an injustice and repugnant. Consequently, I would not consider myself bound by Canon 277.

Despite the views of these priests, they are unable to find any public relief from the pressure to live celibacy because any attempts to openly discuss their difficulties are stifled by other bishops and priests who query their loyalty to the priesthood and personal commitment to celibacy.

Priests are consequently left to their own devices to semantically construct a moral universe in which to live out their celibacy, as was the case for Fr. Jacob,

Looking back, I had an unspoken sense of superiority, but which I wouldn't have acknowledged; most priests wouldn't be aware of it. You have this sense of superiority over others, especially women. We think we are better than other people ... I breathed in a kind of male superiority in the atmosphere of our clerical culture.

Secure in the clerical culture, Fr. Jacob constructed his celibacy to include himself in the priesthood and exclude himself from women whom he considered subordinate

and inferior. Meanwhile, other priests construct their celibacy in a variety of other ways. Some priests, for example, isolate themselves personally from the parish preferring the company of family, particularly the mother. Fr. Mark referred to these priests as “*Mummy’s Boys*” *whose mother supplies the governing relationship. She is very proud of [her son] and cannot help speaking of and for [him]; [these priests] are torn between feelings of affection and oppression.* Fr. Mark also referred to another group of priests who constantly enjoy the company of confreres, for these “*Boyos*” *[love] nothing better than to go golfing, drinking, to the football or racing with a group of blokes.* Yet another way priests can create a moral universe that takes care of their celibacy is to become “*Career men*” *who can shelve the question of relationships because it is detrimental to their accession to power or to their accumulation of assets.*

I also observed a number of priests who immerse themselves in their studies and hobbies, which inevitably minimises the possibility of becoming involved in any type of intimate relationship. Conversely, and according to Nouwen (1969, p. 119), if a priest

has not found a personal form of intimacy where he can be happy, his parishioners become his needs. He spends long hours with them, more to fulfil his desires than theirs [but] he tends to lose the hierarchy of relationships, never feels safe, is always on alert, and finds himself terribly misunderstood and lonesome.

Alternatively, priests may use the *celibacy vaccine*, a priestly euphemism for alcohol, to quell their needs for intimacy: substances such as food and drugs are also included in the self-prescribed vaccinating programs of priests.⁹¹ These priests often desire relationships but the law says yes to *Punch* and no to *Judy*.⁹² In these creative frameworks, priests may also elect to be single and sexually abstinent, either by choice or otherwise;⁹³ single with occasional or rare sexual encounters; *promiscuous*

⁹¹ Unsworth (1993, p. 61) suggests alcoholism is a significant problem in the priesthood. Unsworth then gives anecdotal evidence of what may be a typical percentage of priests who are alcoholic: “in an ordination of class of twenty ... between 18 to 27 percent.” One priest stated, “It’s the only thing that wasn’t a sin ... Drink is the first thing you’re offered when you get upstairs in a rectory.”

⁹² One priest, who at the beginning of his priesthood, was advised to choose *Punch* over *Judy*, euphemisms for alcohol and women.

⁹³ Some priests consider the preferred type of relationship is unavailable.

Tom-cats; companioned in monogamous or serially monogamous relationships with nil or “degrees” of sexual activity. Fr. Jacob summed up these latter scenarios by explaining, *the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. I’m simply saying, occasionally someone comes along, stands by you, and becomes your mate and things work out.* Fr. Ben also maintains that coping with celibacy is left to the individual priest: *My impression is that most priests who are not happy with the situation of celibacy simply do what they believe is appropriate, but do not discuss it much with others.* These priests are highly creative in managing their celibacy. They ensure that the abstract notion promoted by the papacy is upheld, but in a fashion that can be locally manage.

I also listened to those priests whose frustration with celibacy inevitably produces antagonism towards the papacy: *Celibacy could be abolished today. You wouldn’t have to wait until midnight if we had someone with a bit of sense who was Pope,* said Fr. Joel. Most priests who were interviewed considered the papacy’s definition of celibacy as being impractical, unrealistic and unrelated to the contemporary realities of priesthood, as did Fr. Zac: *If I had to stand with the Pope before the Lord, my wisdom would say that we ought to make it optional.* Fr. Cain was much more explicit: *If the Pope had done it he wouldn’t be so concerned, but the trouble is he has only known sexual fantasy, masturbation and struggle. So, we too are forced to live out our sexuality like that.* Fr. Daniel alternatively considered *the Pope’s celibacy agenda is created by stupidity. It’s not created by anything other than that.* Fr. Adam bitterly exclaimed: *I think mandated celibacy is mischievous, dangerous and arrogant. It would be hard for me to say everything I feel about it. I think it’s demonic.* Moreover, Fr. Jim severed the papacy’s advocacy for celibacy from God’s intention: *[Celibacy] is an infringement of a basic God-given right that should be dispensed with. [We should] introduce optional celibacy rather than continue with a man-made law* [‘News from Britain and Ireland’ 2003, p. 31]. The rhetorical assessments of celibacy made by these priests indicate that they judge celibacy inappropriate and senseless, which leads them to doubt the credibility of the papacy’s moral authority.

The Moral Relativity of Celibacy

As can be seen, the moral prescriptions of priests with friends are in direct contradiction to the codified perspective of the papacy. This disjunction consequently requires priests to invent means and ways to negotiate their friendships both in their personal and public lives. One of the ways that they manage this task is to use shifters. Shifters are ingenious tricks used by priests to determine their own moral designation, but which formally defer to the moral demands of the papacy. They become apparent and are used in the context of a particular interaction. For example, a priest who is speaking to his bishop, may refer to his friend as “a parishioner,” “the housekeeper,” “Sister,” or “Brother,” and in so doing, he obscures his intimate relationship. For the bishop, on the other hand, these characterizations imply sexual distance, thereby negating any concern for the priest’s celibacy or consequent scandal. Yet, for those who are aware of the culturally intimate circumstances, the context is sufficiently well defined to ascertain whether the priest means acquaintance or friendship. Meanwhile, the bishop who maintains strictly formal relationships and is removed from the everyday life of the priest is not privy to this contextual awareness and so, interprets relational terms with lexicographical rigidity. However, when priests with friends use these shifters to accommodate moral fluidity in these contexts, they are coopted and subsumed into bureaucratic processes, creating potential structural instability in the priesthood.

The use of shifters is not confined to priest with friends. Priests may think they share a common understanding of celibacy, but in actuality, each priest has his own definition. When priests endeavour to make moral diagnoses of where the celibate-sexual boundaries lie at the local level, the criteria they use is often negotiable, as evidenced by the rhetoric of priest respondents. Fr. James defines celibacy as being *about a radical, unattached singleness directed to and directed by God. It’s about a commitment to a task in life in which the catalyst of the task is the person, and that task requires singleness. It is a task that takes prior commitment over a relationship of commitment.* Fr. James does not actually preclude intimate friendship, he just happens to prioritise his priestly vocation, which on the face of it, fits with the papacy’s expectations. Fr. Joshua, on the other hand, describes celibacy in a different way,

I see taking my vows of chastity in the celibate state as the calling for me to acclaim, to own my sexuality and see it as gift. And in seeing that as my special gift and to aspire to live a celibate way it may be necessary for me to grow by giving expression genitally with someone. I don't see that genital expression as going against the vow of celibacy. I see it as a stepping-stone, to taking on that commitment to live the vow as promised.

Fr. Joshua sees his celibacy as an acclamation of his sexuality, and in his journey of pronouncement he might choose to become sexually intimate with another, a relationship that he considers will ultimately lead him to the fulfilment of his vow. Fr. David is, however, more succinct in his definition: *I live celibacy – but not in the traditional way!* Celibacy allows for a surprising amount of semantic slippage; yet, the appearance of fixity allows priests to treat definitions of celibacy as though they were existential absolutes rather than conditioned negotiations. Nonetheless, the papacy would dispute such definitions.

Although sexual intimacy is conventionally associated with married laity, priests can transfer this abstract notion to their own lives and regard it as a part of their preferred social order, which they express in a variety of ways. I listened to priest respondents who reported that some priests have an insatiable desire to know about the sexuality of their confreres, as expressed in priestly doublespeak: *how's it hanging; is your equipment in order; how're you getting on?* Such inquiry in itself is sexually intimate, and presupposes the sexual activity of confreres. From another perspective, several priests, including Fr. David, complained about the need for intimacy,

The thing that is so difficult is that Catholics don't encourage a priest to experience intimacy at all. They all think a priest is screwing. Actually, I was out to dinner last night with a friend, and I was saying, that the greatest thing I miss is having someone to snuggle into. But if I spoke to my fellow priests openly about that, most of them would think you just want a fuck, and yet it really isn't about having sex.

On the one hand, Fr. David acknowledges his need for intimacy without precluding sexual intimacy. On the other hand, he is complaining about the rigid use of semantics by his confreres and parishioners in which they reduce sexual intimacy to the immoral function of an object, *a screw*. Yet, this typification is exactly the problem for Fr. David, for these Catholics empty his desire for intimacy of those

attributes that he values: *to them it's just a fuck*. However, in the familiarity of our interview, this attribution was given new meaning: *having sex* was replaced with a *need for intimacy*.

The rhetorical innovation of Fr. David highlights the strategic value of semantic fluidity. On the face of it, *screwing* and *fucking* are fixed, negative stereotypes, but Fr. David challenges the insensitive ascriptions of his confreres and parishioners with different meanings that they do not take into account. This priest considers that intimacy is not just about the act of sex, but rather it is about enjoying relational closeness with a trusted and loved friend, which he regards as a moral good: a moral good that Fr. David – and the papacy - recognises as existing in marriage, but which Fr. David transfers to an intimate friendship. Of further interest, in the case of Fr. David, is that he is homosexual, which according to the papacy precludes him from sexual activity. However, this priest has taken the notion of intimacy beyond heterosexual marriage to categories that are more inclusive. Consequently, the *need for intimacy*, which does not preclude sexual intimacy, is perceived by Fr. David to be a moral good for all priests and should be *encouraged*. Such acts of moral attribution can result in changes of meaning of celibacy and sexual intimacy in the priesthood.

The Morality of Sexual Intimacy

In the culturally intimate environment of the priesthood, a shift to a view that celibacy is immoral and sexual intimacy is moral is dependent upon each individual priest's reading of his situation. Within that explanation, each priest uses a shifter to mark a change in the way he regards celibacy and sexual intimacy. Yet, from an official and public perspective, he still appears to maintain the formal definition of celibacy assigned by the papacy. Fr. Simon, for example, explained how he began to change his idea of celibacy when he participated in a pastoral course that required him to interact with women,

I began making sure I was always dressed in clericals, the proper uniform. I was determined to make sure that my priestly dignity was respected by others; feminists had me very worried. It took me about three weeks to ask myself the question about what I was trying to prove. So, I doffed the clerical clothing and didn't wear it again. For me that was quite a decision! I

soon began to act in a more human fashion (less clerical) with the women on the course. After a few months, one of the women told me she loved me. It was a great shock, something I never expected. That night I couldn't get to sleep. I was overjoyed that someone loved me! Just to know that I was loved for myself, that I was lovable.

In this case, Fr. Simon's clothes represented the principal shifter. His clericals expressed priestly superiority and separateness, rhetorically rendering the female participants as distant inferiors. However, when Fr. Simon replaced his priestly garb with civil attire, he made himself socially approachable to the female participants. In doing so, he re-negotiated his moral position within the group. Previous celibate-sexual boundaries were rendered redundant and new moral possibilities were created and unexpectedly realized, which to Fr. Simon had a moral value: *I was loved*.

Fr. Matthew also shifted from a position that friendship with particular others - especially women - was wrong to a view that such friendships are essential to his life and ministry.

The Imitation of Christ (from seminary days) has a fine phrase: "without a true friend, one cannot well live" and went on to expound the need of friendship with Jesus, which is all very well but as human beings we do need someone with skin on, here and now, and who shares deeply with us at different levels. Somehow, from seminary training where friendships were eschewed, I got the idea that having no special friends but of being friendly to everyone with an ideal of impartiality to all. This lasted for many years, especially keeping women at a suitable distance and having little to do with them in a busy life. Then a transfer brought me very close to many women, and the "no friendship" crust began to crack.

From about this time, other acquaintanceships began to develop into friendships, both male and female, with the gradual realisation that we do need special friends and particularly with the opposite sex. I do not think I could exist without close women friends and their warm support and affection. Without such friends one cannot well live.

In the contingent context of Fr. Matthew's transfer, he re-evaluated his relationships, expressed in the phrase – *we need someone with skin on* – which serves as a shifter. From thereon, Fr. Matthew began to reconstruct his personal and priestly identity,

which accommodated his need for friendship and the *warm support and affection* of women, whilst maintaining a view that his particular construction of celibacy precluded intimacy that involved genital activity.

Hingeing a shifter to both the papacy's formal expectations and a priest's unique set of moral values can be very difficult for priests with friends. One such priest respondent struggled with the question: *What is affection and not yet sin?* In effect, the nebulous line of celibacy between priesthood and friendship can create a quandary, leaving a priest in a state of uncertainty or indecision as to what to do or say, as is summed up by Fr. Barnabas: *Inner conflict? Frustration? Too right!* This difficulty in fact, eventually presented itself to Fr. Paul in his friendship with Anna. He very much enjoyed Anna's company and experienced a depth of intimacy that he had never known before, without perceived threat to his vow of celibacy. This was also time of healing past wounds and growth in maturity for him. Then, after a while, the level of closeness moved to another stage where "degrees" of sexual intimacy were expressed, which he was able to morally accommodate in his now extended understanding of celibacy. Such intimacy produced a new empathy for others, a fresh love, and renewed energy to his personal life and ministry. *Thus far, but no further:* Fr. Paul considered he should limit sexual intimacy to what he referred to as *my barriers*,

I have always seen sexual intercourse in terms of that total commitment you make to another person in marriage and I suppose I recognised I hadn't made that commitment to her. I always said to [Anna] that I have always seen my place in the priesthood, that I've made a commitment to it, and I always felt that's where God wants me to be.

For Fr. Paul and other priests who were interviewed, they believe sexual intercourse symbolises an opposing commitment, one that jeopardises their moral investment in the priesthood. Eventually, Fr. Paul and Anna ended their relationship because Anna wanted a degree of commitment that Fr. Paul could not offer. Yet, after Fr. Paul contracted a serious illness they reconciled. Anna's love for Fr. Paul was greater than her need for marriage, and his care and welfare became the shifter that changed her attitude towards their friendship. In this transformative event, Fr. Paul also renegotiated his love for Anna, which led him to the moral view that he could make a

dual commitment to his friend and God, and sexual intercourse became a marker of that inclusion.

In contrast, a small number of priests that responded to this research were unable to negotiate the celibate-sexual boundaries in a manner that they, as individuals, considered morally acceptable. Fr. Peter, for instance, could not hinge his moral view of priesthood with a morality of sexual intimacy and, after eight years of friendship, he said to Eve: *I love you but I treasure the priesthood*, and so ended the relationship. Meanwhile, several priests regard some relationships as unimpressive versions of friendship that detract from and are unsupportive of their lives and ministry. They consider their attempts to make changes in the priesthood are unsuccessful, and attribute their failure to a lack of personal development and communication skills. Fr. Sam in particular made mention of such a friendship,

Each meeting we would go a little further. Never sex (intercourse), never demanding, just relaxing, pleasurable, affirming. A breath of fresh air in an otherwise straight and proper life. I think of them now as half affairs. They were technically wrong but not technically breaking vows. The problem with half affairs is that they go nowhere and eventually the risk outweighs the pleasure. ...The circumstances are in the system, lonely women usually taken for granted, talk about their feelings, the young priest listens attentively. A friendship forms. The kiss goodbye becomes a kiss hello. Nothing is said but both know it has changed. Both know it is wrong, doomed to failure but it fills a gap in your guts.

In this set of circumstances, Fr. Sam acknowledges his immaturity and inappropriate choice of friends, and considers his actions were *technically* immoral. *A kiss hello* filled a want within him; however, Fr. Sam did not recognize this a morally appropriate way to satisfy his need. Moreover, while Fr. Sam recognizes that these relationships are inappropriate, he also implies that the Catholic system is partly culpable. As did Fr. Tim: *It is only by chance that an attraction glimmers with someone else, then after a long time some developed into a mutual sexual affair. But after a relationship went sexual, guilt settled in. I then tried to 'give it up', to spiritualise it all.* This priest's guilt was externally pressured by the papacy's expectations, which, after a while, resulted in personal anxiety. Fr. John also gave his reason for why his previous relationship was unsuccessful: *you get so burdened with the pressure of the Pope's definition [of celibacy] that it really inhibits your*

maturation. While, later, these priests negotiated friendships that accorded with their sense of morality, each of these priests consider these former relationships to be immoral. Moreover, without mitigating their own sense of wrongdoing, they also rhetorically implied that the papacy was also deserving of blame.

Conversely, those priests who have made a contract of love, loyalty, and commitment with their friends, regard sexual intimacy as a significant and valued part of their relationship, as expressed by Fr. Paul,

We really communicate at all levels and the sexual part is really an expression of the way we communicate in everything. My physical nakedness with her says that I can bare my whole self to her. I have shared with her, things I've never shared with anyone else. I am just completely uninhibited with her and that is something very, very precious, to be just so safe and loved.

For priests such as Fr. Paul, sexual intimacy is a revelation of mutual love and a welcomed venture into utter vulnerability. Such intimacy can embody the very same abstract qualities that the papacy reifies in one type of relationship, namely, marriage, but not in another type of relationship, that is, friendship. On the other hand, these priests, through their persuasive arguments, consider that no such moral distinction can be made by such categorization because they regard their friendships as honourable and holy, and certainly worthy of priesthood.

Fr. Ben also identifies a context in which he considers that his relationship is entirely appropriate for his priesthood,

What happened is that quickly I fell in love with Ester in a way that I had never expected even though for the first year there was not even a kiss on the lips. She simply became the person with whom I wanted to share as much of my life as possible. Yet for the first few years there was nothing in the way of any deep physical intimacy. We talked a lot about our feelings and our relationship – about how it fitted in with our faith, with the Church, with God, etc. ... We admitted that we loved each other and eventually made a deep commitment to each other. I believe that if it had been possible we would have married at that point.

Within the context of their ongoing engagement, Fr. Ben's love for Ester and *vice versa*, Ester's love for Fr. Ben, became the primary catalyst for change in his moral

understanding. In constructing his moral view, Fr. Ben took an abstraction, summarized in marriage, and merged it with his own experience of his friendship by identifying valued characteristics in his relationship, namely love, loyalty and commitment that are likewise idealised by the papacy in marriage. By enhancing his understanding in this way, Fr. Ben considers that his friendship is morally positive.

Fr. Tom also envisages his relationship with his *soul mate* in a similar way to Fr. Ben,

I've been a priest for 30 years - happy in my manifold apostolate – and have been gifted with a beautiful soul mate for 20 years. My soul mate often prays with me and certainly prays for me, shares my religious dedication, helps me wherever possible in my apostolate, affirms my commitment of service to our parish, companions me in my days off, and is there for me when the going gets rough.

Again, the presence of characteristics such as love, loyalty and commitment suggest parallels with that of a married couple, which in a different Catholic context is encouraged by the papacy but not within the priesthood. Fr. Tom, however, argues that having a *soul mate for 20 years* is evidence enough to claim that their friendship is moral.

These examples indicate that a morally positive view of friendship is dependent upon a priest's self-understanding of how his relationship contributes to his life and ministry and his ability to construct an argument that he believes to be persuasive and truthful. This analysis also reveals that priests represent the situational character of their moral definitions in historical, social and cultural terms; a form that is not found in the morally rigid lexicography of the papacy. Consequently, these priests have found a way of recasting themselves as the moral centre of the priesthood, even though they are officially situated at its periphery. Concomitantly, these priests situate the papacy at the margins of their lives by skilfully negotiating limitations to their friendships, which without these limits might result in disclosure. It is also noteworthy that priests with friends are able to accommodate a sense of ambiguity about celibacy: after all, celibacy does have more than one meaning and these priests show a keen interest in exploring the detail of their definitions.

God Bless Friendship

A significant number of priests with friends identified supernatural qualities in their relationships, which contributes to their belief that their friendships are moral. Fr. Timothy simply states: *Our relationship is a gift from God.* Fr. Simon, in contrast, admits to the possibility of error, but nuances this with the paradoxical goodness of his friendship: *Well, it is a tension because you think this could be the greatest long-lived mistake I've ever made or really this is a grace-filled and beautiful thing that needs to be cared for and looked after.* Meanwhile, Fr. Matthew came to realize that God is in his friendship during a disagreement he had with his friend, Rachel:

Our relationship was really in crisis, and she said to me, "How do know you are not turning your back on God in refusing to go on loving me in the way we have been - and bringing it to a logical conclusion in marriage." I must say that really made me stop in my tracks, because I really believed God was in our love for each other.

In Rachel's challenge, and upon reflection, Fr. Matthew became aware that God does bless their friendship, and now he maintains that divine favour not only covers his priesthood, but also extends to his relationship. When Fr. Matthew recognizes a supernatural presence in his friendship, he empties the papacy's rhetoric of veracity, divine or otherwise. For this priest, celibacy is an artificial barrier that makes him choose between an abundance of God's blessings and a man-made rule.

Fr. Mark also contends that God is in his friendship: *God? Well my relationship [with God] is better. It's hard to say how it is better, but my conscience tells me it [isn't] really immoral. Do I delude myself? I leave it all to God and thank him.* Fr. Mark has an internal sense that he is closer to God because of his friendship and additionally, that such a relationship is right before God. Consequently, he expresses his gratitude. In Fr. Mark's case, celibacy is no longer a dilemma and hence, the papacy and its ideology fade into the background. Fr. Jonathon similarly recognizes a divine presence,

Of primary importance are my friendships in my life, including Ruth. Those few who have given me real unconditional love – have given me a glimpse of God's love. I want to live in such a way that I would never let them down. Their investment in my life I try never to take for granted – they are a reason to want

to go on living.

Fr. Jonathon argues that God's love is being shown to him through a number of loving relationships, including his intimate friendship with Ruth. Cherishing these relationships, and honouring them is so important to him that they are the reason for his existence. Indeed, for Fr. Jonathon, such relationships are the living Gospel in which God's love is predominantly indicated.

In effect, priests with friends cast aside the celibate singleness demanded by the papacy and its view that their friendships are immoral, because they think, feel, and see themselves in friendships blessed by God. But these priests still have to come terms with the conflict between celibacy and sexual intimacy. Fr. Tom, aware of the irreconcilable position between the papacy and his friendship, concludes, *I don't try and work it out, because I can't. So I take it as gift.* This awareness of sanctification automatically confers a positive morality, which subsequently removes the papacy from a position of being a credible moral arbiter. In fact, the papacy is perceived to be going against the divine plan for their lives, *because you can't live out the love you have for another person, as you would want*, said another priest. Moreover, Fr. Philip maintains that if *priests are ignoring the vow/promise of celibacy: this would be the sensum fidelium at work.* According to McBrien (1994, p. 24), the *sensum fidelium* is "the sense of faith that the People of God share among themselves...(that) shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals." Fr. Philip considers that if priests believe that their friendships are in accord with the corporate experience of faith, and the "People of God" agrees on this matter, then the *sensum fidelium* should be acknowledged by the papacy.

The Ambiguity of Celibacy

There are two quite distinct approaches to meaning on the part of the papacy and priests with friends. The papacy maintains an inflexible lexicographical perspective on the meaning of celibacy with this strict interpretation being made abundantly clear in its canonical terminology. Indeed, this lexicography is so inflexible that it cannot accommodate any specific term that describes the friendships of priests. This non-definition is intentional, for without a shared vocabulary, priests have difficulty in creating a language that undermines celibacy. Yet, in listening to priests I discovered

that they are endeavouring to remedy that situation by using terms relatively so that their friendships can be accommodated in the broader lexicography of the Church, although they use terminology in senses directly opposed to the meanings given in codified law. By taking affective descriptions conventionally associated with sexuality in marriage, and applying them to their own relationships, these priests strategically maximize the normalcy of sexual intimacy in the priesthood. Such tactical uses of meaning constantly threaten the semantic stability of the papacy's moral universe that is negotiated through legal, ethical and administrative concepts of celibacy. Moreover, these priests live out their interpretations and actively promote ambiguity, thrusting alternative notions of sexual intimacy into the priesthood.

Ironically, such ambiguity becomes a defining characteristic within the culturally intimate confines of priesthood but this is categorically denied by the papacy, for systems, and those who administer them, abhor ambiguity and compromise because differentiation can create doubt that can lead to structural disintegration. Accordingly, the papacy states, "priests' relationships with women [and men] must "not admit of ambiguity" (John Paul II 1995, p. 473). The strategic etymologies used by priests to describe their friendships are therefore rejected by the papacy, for sexual intimacy is contrary to the hierarchical order. The rhetoric used by priests with friends is identified by the papacy as a source of systemic contradiction, which must be purged from the priesthood. Hence, priests who have been found out to be not living celibacy as officially expected attract penalties, which can include transfer from the parish in which they minister to some distant geographical location and/or denial of promotion, as was the case for Fr. Peter,

I got to confess in rather a pre-emptory way. The town gossips reported me to the bishop. He called me in, said he was concerned about my career and something about piety and good works. Then I was exiled to a small country parish. I was disappointed by my failure and my blighted career and letting the side down. In hindsight, it was all pious piffle.

Fr. Peter is quite aware of how ineffective his bishop's admonishments were; neither the *town gossips* and the bishop, nor himself at the time, grasped the idea that he was having difficulties with celibacy that required creative pastoral and doctrinal

approaches. Only later did Fr. Peter come to the realization that celibacy is inappropriate for him: *The tensions of friendship and intimacy are still with me and worry me less, but I know that I am lacking in human development because of the celibate lifestyle.* The papacy in effect, disregards Fr. Peter's problems, whilst giving priority to its notion of the priesthood; thus, it directs and uses his relocation to uphold hierarchical order and its moral authority.

Other priests such as Fr. Ben, whilst acknowledging the threat created by the papacy's inflexible lexicography, continue to explore alternative meanings for the priesthood,

I know that any moment we could come up against a wall of opposition to our relationship. I believe that I have to be discreet and understand the way the system operates. I believe that this is simply accepting the realities of life and is not being hypocritical. I never hide the fact from anyone that I do not believe that I have been called by God to be celibate.

I believe that the Lord is still calling me to be a priest and I shall be prepared to fight any challenges to my ministry. Even if the system wins in the end (which no doubt it will if I am alone in my struggle) at least a new path may begin to open up for the young men who experience the same call to follow Christ in priestly ministry.

By constructing a contrary rhetoric that uses discretion, canniness and diplomacy, Fr. Ben is able to stay within culturally compliant boundaries. Yet, from the perspective of the papacy, Fr. Ben's friendship compromises the priesthood and, therefore, Fr. Ben is a hypocrite. Fr. Ben, however, considers compromise is necessary for change in the priesthood and hence, he considers his priestly invention is sincere and genuine. By opposing the stereotypes used by the papacy, Fr. Ben endeavours to promote his friendship in meaningful ways to bring about change. Thus, those priests who are willing to explore issues of ambiguity can affect local etymological uses of celibacy and sexual intimacy.

Official representatives of the papacy are evidently beginning to take on a local language of reform. In the wake of the United State's priest sex abuse scandal,

individual cardinals⁹⁴ have acknowledged that celibacy should be discussed, “but stopped short of an endorsement” (‘Cardinals Look to Draft Abuse Rules’ 2002). These papal representatives discreetly acknowledge the harm of sexual abuse and the possible connection these offences may have with celibacy. Yet, they do not recognize the positive experiences of priests with friends as a reason for reforming celibacy. Meanwhile, Vatican spokespersons have said the issue is not on the table: “The pope has spoken to this. He has said celibacy remains. It is a great gift to the church” (Allen 2002b). The papacy, mindful of its moral duty in upholding the priesthood, admits to no ambiguity.

While the creative etymologies of priests with friends have not yet made it to official levels at the Vatican, Catholic observers are continuing to hint at the possibilities of new configurations. “One may not be optimistic about change now, but all this is a prelude to the next papacy; bringing these ideas to Rome and putting them on the table plants seeds for the future. It puts them in the minds of those electing the next pope” (Lampman 2002). In order to protect the moral authority of the papacy, cardinals are shrewdly and sensitively reconfiguring etymologies that were once foreign to the papacy’s lexicography. What is described here is not simply a process whereby a potentially emergent papacy arrogates to itself the moral privileges that hitherto belong to priests with friends. It is also a process where popular concepts of morality are being cautiously and unofficially considered as a means to restore harmony within a fragmented priesthood.

In the meantime, certain priests, at least officially, continue to identify celibacy with priesthood and thereby surrender the right of cultural definition to the agencies of the papacy’s control. Alternatively, other priests adopt a position of neutrality, such as Fr. Aaron: *I won’t publicly disown celibacy, but I won’t publicly acclaim that either. I would rejoice when people say we have a vocation to the priesthood, but a vocation to celibacy is another matter.* At the same time, priests with friends are also attuned to the negotiation of sexual intimacy within the context of priesthood, which calls the bluff of official rhetoric and in doing so, they continue to pressure the possibility of

⁹⁴ Cardinals are that group of clergy who are next in rank to the pope. This group is given exclusive right to elect the next pope from their own number and act as his advisers.

another moral perspective. These latter priests discount the papacy's etymology of celibacy that assumes separateness and superiority, and seek to replace this with an egalitarian reading that is drawn from their experience of friendship.

Conclusion

The concern of this chapter has been with how morality is constructed and used by a dominant social group and subalterns as a means of positioning an individual in a social order. Both the papacy and priests with friends aim to construct a total moral vision, but each does so in instructively different ways. The papacy, for instance, constructs etymologies to support its argument that morality is fixed in absolute and eternal ideals that have been played out through the centuries; a claim that it supports with a discriminatory reading of history. Bolstered by these arguments, the papacy then essentializes these etymologies in a rigid lexicography to promulgate and protect its moral deductions. In consequence, the papacy constructs a morality that locates an abstract system of belief above and beyond the contingencies and complexities of priests' lives and ministries, which effectively ensures priests are formally positioned in an hierarchical order. From this exalted perspective, the papacy therefore assumes to have the exclusive right and responsibility to determine what is moral. Thus, a dominant social group believes it has a total and unequivocal authority to establish a moral system.

Priests with friends, however, reject the papacy's belief that it alone has the right and responsibility to determine what is moral and so they assume a moral licence to wrestle with the contradictions of celibacy that beset their lives and ministries. In their endeavour to resolve these difficulties, these priests relativise the moral position of the papacy with the aim of promoting their own moral vision as a meaningful absolute for their lives and ministry. In doing so, priests with friends expand the official moral vocabulary, thereby creating a broader language from which to draw upon, but which subsequently produces further disjunctions because that language is not accepted by the papacy. In contrast to the papacy that constructs morality through etymology from a single set of absolute and eternal ideas, these priests produce their rhetoric of morality from etymologies that are undergirded by historical consciousness that takes into account diverse sources such as the individual, particular circumstances and relational values. Having opened up the position of the

papacy, these priests are then able to argue for the need to reform celibacy, in order to arrive at a total morality that positions themselves within a social order that accommodates their friendships. As a result, subalterns challenge a total moral vision by subtly promoting alternative notions of celibacy and related issues, thereby challenging the absolutist and eternal stance of the dominant social group.

The disjunctions produced by the different etymologies produce social dissonance, not because these resultant moralities are necessarily pitted against the absolutist moral system of the papacy, but because of the dissimilar positions taken by the papacy and priests with friends. The papacy, however, cannot tolerate doubt and compromise; its morality is static, straightforward and precise: “clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence” (*The Code of Canon Law* 1983, p. 47). Whereas, the morality of priests with friends has a certain degree of flexibility, latitude, and ambiguity: priests may observe celibacy permanently or temporarily, or engage in sexually intimate friendships that are ideally permanent but are dependent upon the circumstances of individuals and their particular relationship. These differences have significant ramifications for how an individual is to be positioned in social order. Thus, it is clear that priests with friends do think, speak and act differently from what the papacy would prefer. Moreover, such an examination shows how these priests can be acutely loyal and just as acutely detached at one and the same time, which suggests that the priesthood will continue, but not necessarily in the way the papacy envisages. A moral conception of priesthood is also upheld by identity, and in chapter six, this aspect is examined through images that signify belonging to the priesthood.

CHAPTER SIX

The Struggle Over Identities

Doubt plagued Fr. Jack: *I have to be a priest. I am not permitted to be me. I am told that I have to be a priest. So what's the hell a priest?* Fr. Jack is like many of his confreres who are currently experiencing uncertainty and difficulty about their identity, and celibacy is tied up in that crisis. Officially, celibacy is one symbol and practice used to mark priests out as being separate and superior; an exclusionary tactic that protects the papacy's understanding of a total priestly identity. This identity is formalized by doctrine and canon law that define how priests are to relate to others, and any attempt to overthrow celibacy is resisted and rejected by the papacy. Priests with friends, however, are informally re-negotiating their identity within the context of their relationships and contend that sexual intimacy is of value to their lives and ministries.

In this chapter, I focus my attention on how identity is rhetorically negotiated in the priesthood and Church by the papacy and priests with friends as a means for positioning an individual in a social order. In this dispute, the papacy endeavours to control an individual's identity through the uniform policy of celibacy that upholds hierarchical order. Meanwhile, priests with friends attempt to resist that manipulation by asserting the value of pluralism for negotiating priestly identity, a religious and social policy that would accommodate the diverse experiences encountered in the lives and ministries of priests.

I approach this disagreement by drawing on a theoretical process known as iconicity to examine key images that are formally used by the papacy to rhetorically represent a celibate identity, which strategically orders a priest to hierarchical order. Four significant sets of images used by the papacy are analysed, which include the images of Jesus as celibate; principal scripture verses used to control celibacy; saints as celibate exemplars; and the celibate image inferred in the priest's title, "Father." In conjunction with this analysis, I also examine the rhetorical responses to these images by priests with friends, and their idiomatic efforts to create new and meaningful images for positioning an individual in a social order. I then show how

the struggle over the negotiation of images indicates an ongoing search for meaning; a dialectical process that can be restrained by a dominant social group, but which ultimately seeks social resolution.

The Process of an Iconicity of Celibacy

Identity constituted by images that are said to represent a likeness to somebody or something, and the particular process that produces this imaging of the essentialized self, are called iconicity. In order to explain this process, it is useful to start from the root word, “icon” (from Greek *eikon*, meaning likeness or image), and then insert it into a particular religious context. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, for instance, an icon is used to represent a holy person, such as the Virgin Mary or a saint. These Christians also attribute to that icon similar qualities perceived to be represented by that particular holy person and thus, an icon not only resembles the sacred, but an icon is also sacred in itself. This example serves to illustrate the more technical semiotic use of “icon.” An icon, in this latter sense, is a term that is given to those signs that share some quality or property of that which is depicted. Hence, in the iconic process of taking on a quality from another source, a person or thing reflects that image, now held in common, which contributes to the construction of his, her or its identity.

This process also suggests that “a sign is only an icon because someone uses it that way, and because others agree to understand it as such” (Herzfeld 1997, p. 57). An atheist, for example, would likely perceive a religious icon to be an oil painting on a wooden panel that depicts a specific historical person. This person would not agree to understand an icon in the same way as an Eastern Christian. Consequently, icons cannot exist beyond consciousness; they manifest themselves in the cultural understandings of particular people. Nevertheless, these signifying processes are difficult to recognize because they exhibit a “natural” relationship of resemblance with their referents, which makes them appear unproblematic (Bouissac 1986, p. 194). Again, returning to our example, Eastern Christians take it for granted that icons are sacred, because to them, icons are “natural” images of the sacred, while, in contrast, an atheist would not accept that icons have this intrinsic character. The elusive character of icons is aided and abetted by reification; yet, from another

perspective, such as that of an atheist, these signs do not resemble their alleged referents at all.

The papacy uses the process of iconicity to fix celibacy to the identity of a priest and it believes and asks all others to believe that “[celibacy] belongs to the logic of priestly consecration and to the total belonging to Christ resulting from it” (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). In this process, the papacy makes celibacy an intrinsic characteristic of priesthood. By obscuring the constructedness of iconicity, the papacy is able to create consistent imitations of perceived natural and supernatural relations between celibacy and priesthood. The papacy not only creates a similitude between celibacy and priesthood through pragmatic and divine associations, its reification of celibacy as a super/natural feature of priesthood helps to protect this icon from uncertainties and difficulties that might arise. However, the resemblance between celibacy and priesthood can only, at best, be considered an imperfect likeness. This imperfection lies in the fact that to create iconicities, a resemblance must rest on the possibility of difference in order to create tension necessary for spiritual, structural and symbolic vitality. Therefore, the difficulty for the papacy is that iconicity is not tautological repetition but rather, it works through complex bonds of shifting beliefs and malleable acceptance that are continuously shaped by dialogue. Consequently, if the papacy cannot continue the similitude between celibacy and priesthood through an imaginative exchange of ideas, a person might reasonably ask what has celibacy got to do with being a priest.

The decision to recognise iconicity always has political implications that can impact on a person’s beliefs. A priest’s confident belief in the truth of celibacy in the formal context of the Church might come to be regarded as a falsehood in a different context where new principles are advocated. For those priests to whom I listened, this is, in fact, what has occurred. Previously they accepted celibacy without question, but new situations and relationships have affected the understanding of their priestly identity. These priests criticise the official images used to support celibacy, whilst creating informal images that provide alternative understandings that have personal relevance and meaning. Nevertheless, such priests are unable to contest and replace formal iconicities because the papacy denies them access to official forums. Meanwhile, the politically powerful papacy is able to limit any embarrassments caused by dissenting

priests and maintain celibacy because it officially controls the vehicles of iconicity. Through access to privileged means of communication, such as the pulpit and other Church media, the papacy can continue to constitute iconicities of celibacy that uphold its prerogatives and privileges. Thus, the papacy insists upon a celibate identity for the priesthood, despite “the practice of celibacy [facing] obstacles, sometimes grave ones, in the subjective and objective conditions in which priests happen to live” (John Paul II 1993, p. 11).

The Iconicity of Jesus as Celibate

In order to achieve a homogeneous celibate identity, the papacy articulates idioms we can identify as structural nostalgia. These idioms are constructed from seemingly static images that are allegedly drawn from an unspoiled and irrecoverable past. Such images are bolstered by a sanitized and seemingly perfected version of antiquity, which is used as a source of moral authority that is invested with eternal truth to legitimize celibacy in the contemporary priesthood. One anthropological strategy that can be used to examine these idioms is to foreground certain aspects of selected images that the papacy prefers to remain in the background to ensure the effectiveness of its iconicities. By undertaking historical analyses and exegeses of key images that are used in official iconicities, I can illuminate the workings of this principal strategy, which is aimed at promoting celibacy as being a natural and supernatural aspect of the priestly identity. Such an analysis can lead to a reappraisal of celibacy as an axiom, which has religious, social and political ramifications for both the papacy and priests with friends in their negotiation of priestly identities. This examination is then followed by a critique of the papacy’s representations as proposed by priests with friends.

The principal iconicity that the papacy uses to secure celibacy is the representation that Jesus lived as a celibate (John Paul II 1993, p. 11; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1994, p. 404). Even though there is no ancient source that can be used as a proof or final text, the papacy asserts that this representation is a truism. However, when historical criticism is applied to the milieu in which Jesus lived, the veracity of this claim is questionable. Jesus was a Jew and Judaism was a sex positive religion, exalting marriage and its erotic dimensions. Conversely, celibacy was considered “peculiar and unnatural, detrimental to society, and fatal to the species” (Abbott

2000, p. 107). Furthermore, in the Mediterranean world of Jesus' time, marriage symbolised fusion of the honour of two extended families and was undertaken with a view to political and/or economic concerns (Malina 1993, p. 126). It was the father's duty to arrange the marriage contract, which was endorsed by the groom and bride who gave staunch loyalty to the family and obedience to family authorities (Malina 1993, p. 127; Pilch and Malina 1993, p. 70). It is important to remember at this point that "the autonomy of the individual, a development of the modern West, is entirely absent from the societies and cultures reflected in the Bible or those known to its authors" (Pilch and Malina 1993, p. 70). The family meant everything, and an individual was considered secondary.

The Jewish rabbis also imposed religious expectations on the family that included marriage, and the Talmud lists five principal responsibilities of a father to his son: "circumcise him, redeem him, teach him Torah; teach him a trade, find him a wife" (Phipps 1996, p. 34).⁹⁵ Scripture records that Joseph carried out the four former responsibilities with no mention of the fifth, but if Jesus subordinated himself to the will of his father in these former matters, then we may assume that Joseph sought for Jesus a suitable bride. Jesus, like other young Jewish males, "especially like those who studied the Torah, entered the married state" (Ranke-Heinemann 1990, p. 44). Moreover, as a student of Jewish teachings, Jesus would have also been familiar with the imposed celibacy of Jeremiah that symbolised God's disfavour, where God threatened to withdraw life and health, grace and future from disobedient Jews (Jer 16:1-4). The papacy, however, does not mention any of these historical and social details in official documents that promulgate celibacy, for these facts would threaten its essentialist reading of Jesus.

Some scholars see Stoic parallels in the lifestyle of Jesus, most visible in his austere life and apostolic mission (Duling and Perrin 1994, p. 68).⁹⁶ Evidence of sexual anxiety is reflected in the Essene's community but Jesus' association with this group

⁹⁵ The Torah is the collective body of Jewish literature and oral tradition, containing the laws and teachings of the religion.

⁹⁶ Stoics belonged to a Greek school of philosophy founded by Zeno about 308 B.C., which later formed an important feature of Roman culture. Stoics believed that one should be free from passion and calmly accept all occurrences in submission to divine will or the natural order (Reader's Digest 1984, p. 1639).

is unknown.⁹⁷ Yet, even if such influences existed, Jesus would still have been obliged to honour kinship rules. Honour and shame were core values in the Mediterranean world and if Jesus had not married, he would have dishonoured his parents thereby inviting shame upon himself which he would have been obliged to express in public denial and repudiation. Furthermore, if Jesus had refused marriage, then his opponents among the Pharisees would have reproached him with that, and his disciples would have asked him about this sin of omission (Ranke-Heinemann 1990, p. 45). Yet, the idea of a socially sinful Jesus is far removed from that of the papacy's understanding of its primordial Christian figure.

However, reasons are put forward as to why Jesus did not marry. McBrien (1994, p. 559) lists three arguments against the suggestion that Jesus was married,

- (1) The Gospels say nothing at all about a marriage;
- (2) the anti-erotic bias of the New Testament churches came very early into Christianity, and it can be supposed that if Jesus had married, that tendency would have been checked; and most, decisively;
- (3) when Paul invoked his right to marry a believing woman "as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas (1 Corinthians 9:5), why did he not appeal to Jesus' own marriage to support his argument?

Firstly, scripture says very little about sexuality and there is almost total silence about the sexuality of Jesus.⁹⁸ Secondly, the anti-erotic bias occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., when the fledgling Christian diaspora became vulnerable to other philosophies and religions. Thirdly, Paul never met Jesus, except in his vision of Christ on the road to Damascus, and since this experience became the principal focus of Paul's teachings, it may have lessened the importance Paul gave to the historical Jesus. Yet, even if Jesus did remain celibate for unknown reasons, the papacy's argument from an absence of proof still renders its absolutist claim

⁹⁷ The Essenes were an ascetic Jewish group that flourished in Palestine and Syria from the 2nd century BC to the 2nd century AD. Its members, consisting only of men, who shared property, practiced celibacy and observed the Sabbath (Microsoft Corporation 2000).

⁹⁸ Scripture records a few references to sexual morality which do convey something of Jesus' attitude toward sexuality in the context of his teachings about divorce and adultery (for example, Matthew 5 27-28; 19:1-12).

questionable. This analysis shows that the sexual status of Jesus would have been shaped by social phenomena pressured by religious and cultural circumstances.

These social conditions are vastly removed from those of the priesthood of the twenty-first century, making dubious any claims made by the papacy for the continuity or appropriateness of celibacy based on the life of Jesus.⁹⁹ In spite of this, the papacy interprets slivers of history, removes them from historical and social contexts, grafts them onto its own ideology to bolster contingent claims, and then elevates them to eternal truths; a process that it uses to maintain its belief system and hierarchical order.

For those priests who have been raised on this truism, the realization that Jesus may not have been celibate can be quite traumatic. When I presented the above evidence to Fr. Ben, he became noticeably pale. Jesus was *the* reason for his celibacy and for sacrificing marriage and fatherhood, the loss of which he continues to grieve over. I then presented this evidence to another priest. Fr. John, however, still believes Jesus was celibate, but is uncomfortable with the importance of Jesus' celibacy: *I feel awkward with the situation that is advanced, that Jesus' virginity is held up as a better way of life.* For Fr. John, the ascendancy of celibacy is difficult to sustain in light of his experience of family and friends who are married.

Other priests, however, subtly reinterpret the notion of a celibate Jesus. Fr. Joseph, for example, asserted that *there is no direct evidence in any of the Gospels to suggest that Jesus was married. But neither is there any evidence to suggest that he was not, and if we look at him not as a theological construct, but as a historical character who lived in a particular social and historical context, perhaps a different point of view might emerge.* Here, there is an acknowledgement that the notions of the theological Jesus and the historical Jesus can contradict each other, which suggests a struggle between competing iconicities. Fr. Joseph also implies that an awareness of these differences invites pluralism, which has pragmatic application in optional

⁹⁹ In the second century, the Church assimilated Hellenistic ideas about body, mind and soul, particularly those of Gnosticism that asserted the body was fundamentally evil. Gnostic influence is further mentioned in chapter eight. In this milieu, Tatian (c. 150-200), who was later declared a heretic, disseminated the first recorded idea of the celibate Jesus (Phipps 1996, p. 159).

celibacy. Usually priest respondents had not given critical thought to the papacy's representation of a celibate Jesus.

Fr. Luke, however, took a different tack. He completely pushed the question of Jesus' celibacy aside: *Jesus chose a married man as his first pope and we know that celibacy was not a concern for Jesus or the apostles and disciples, it is therefore not intrinsic to the priesthood.* For Fr. Luke, the notion of Jesus being celibate is irrelevant; he suggests that even if Jesus was celibate that does not mean priests have to be. Priests with friends therefore generally no longer accept the resemblance made by the papacy between Jesus and celibacy, nor do they necessarily acknowledge the importance of this resemblance for maintaining celibacy. Consequently, these priests search for new images to reconstruct their identity, which from the perspective of the papacy, means ongoing protests against celibacy and dissenting practices.

The Iconic Use of Scripture: The Matthean Idiom

At the Second Vatican Council, two scripture passages were put forward by the papacy of Paul VI to maintain the practice of celibacy, namely, Mt 19:11-12 and 1 Cor 7:7-9, 25-38 (Abbott 1967, pp. 565-566). The current papacy continues to uphold these biblical imperatives, claiming that these pre-eminent counsels show “that precious gift of divine grace [is] given to some by the Father (cf. Mt. 19:11; 1 Cor 7:7) in order to more easily devote themselves to God alone with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy” (John Paul II 1992, p. 55). Consequently, the papacy has adapted and inserted these two scripture passages into its canon of celibacy, Canon 277#1 as recorded in chapter four. The following exegesis, however, brings to the forefront of our consciousness, aspects of these passages that the papacy prefers to remain hidden because such information undermines the iconic relationship between celibacy and priesthood.

The Gospel of Matthew was written around 85-90 for the Hellenistic Jewish Christian mission (Duling and Perrin 1994, p. 10). This particular Jewish community, shaped by Greek customs, language and culture that valued celibacy,

tolerated its practice.¹⁰⁰ The author of Matthew was, therefore, able to forward celibacy, in the name of Jesus, as an ideal consequence of divorce, while still maintaining a Jewish model of Church,

... whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.” 10His disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” 11But he said to them, “Not everyone can accept this teaching but only those whom it is given. 12For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can” (Mt. 19:9-12).

While verses 11-12 are used by the papacy to support celibacy, an exegesis of this passage shows that such an iconic construction is problematic. For instance, verse 12 is read by certain scholars as meaning people should “devote themselves more fully to the urgent demands of the kingdom,” a teaching that would have been readily upheld by the Hellenists who believed that it was paramount to convert others before the imminent parousia (Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy 1989, p. 662).¹⁰¹ Other exegetes such as Ranke-Heinemann (1990, p. 33) assert that this passage is about divorce and the metaphorical reference to celibacy is to be read only in that context. This passage deals not with the incapacity for marriage or the principled rejection of it, but with renouncing adultery. It is difficult, therefore, to understand how a resemblance can be sustained between the Hellenists’ celibacy and the contemporary priesthood’s celibacy, for priests are neither anxious about the parousia nor divorce.

Priest respondents generally indicated that this scripture verse is not helpful for establishing a celibate identity. Fr. Simon cynically suggests the Holy Spirit works at the papacy’s behest:

... to see an individual’s celibacy as a sign and charism of the Kingdom of God is praiseworthy; to see it as the Spirit-given grace of chastity is fine. But I believe that linking that grace to the Sacrament of Orders in such a way as to demand it of

¹⁰⁰ Greek philosophy emphasised the superiority of being freed from the world of matter, and since sexual desire was considered a part of the world and deemed a distraction in the pursuit of truth, celibacy was promoted as an ideal. Further discussion is given to this point in chapter eight.

¹⁰¹ In early Christianity, Christians believed that the parousia, or second coming of Christ was imminent, which tended to obviate procreation in marriage.

all priests effectively constitutes an attempt to “force the hand” of the Holy Spirit [original emphasis].

Fr. Simon and his confreres also argue that other priests may be able to live celibacy because they are given this charism, but these priests refute the idea that they have been given such a gift. Other priest respondents, including Fr. Matthew and Fr. Peter, respectively reject the use of this scripture passage as an adequate image for celibacy: *I’m not a eunuch; I hate that really.* Fr. Sam retorts that the only image of eunuchism that can be upheld in the priesthood is the one inflicted upon priests by the papacy: *we are eunuched by Rome.* Yet, another priest offered the following brief sermon,

I keep thinking what Jesus said; some men are born eunuchs, some men are made eunuchs by other men and some men are eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom, and then he said, take this in, you whose hearts are large enough. So celibacy is for those whose hearts are large enough, which is a minority: those priests have the maturity to handle it and to really love in that celibate way. But it’s not every one’s cup of tea, and if I had a chance to live my life again, I’m not too sure whether I would choose celibacy at all. I probably wouldn’t.

This priest does not totally reject celibacy for all priests, only for those who do not have what it takes to make this a loving practice. Overall, each of these priest respondents argues that the papacy’s iconic construction of “celibacy for the Kingdom” does not provide positive meaning for their own lives and ministries. In doing so, they reject the official representation that celibacy is synonymous with the priesthood.

The Iconic Use of Scripture: The Corinthian Idiom

The second scripture passage used by the papacy to construct an image of celibacy is taken from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians,

⁸To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. ³²...The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided ... ³⁵I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint on you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord (1 Cor 7:8, 32 , 35).

The papacy interprets these verses for its diverse purposes, claiming that celibacy gives, “a more complete adherence to Christ, loved and served with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-33) [and provides] greater availability to serve Christ’s kingdom” (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). Yet, by restoring historical and social details relating to this letter, we can again unravel the papacy’s selective use of this passage.

The Christians of Corinth were a zealous people who welcomed alternative visions of Christianity and competed with one another for spiritual prestige. One ascetic faction, in opposition to the libertarianism of some Christians, rigorously followed Paul’s example of celibacy and developed an over-realized eschatology (Murphy-O’Connor 1979, p. xiii). This group asserted that all Christians should be celibate even if they were already married (Conzelmann 1985, pp. 14-15). Paul intended to rectify this extreme view by moderating prevailing asceticism, restoring balance to both celibate and married life,¹⁰² and situating this teaching within the influence of the parousia. An inspection of the chapter demonstrates that Paul is seen to be defending both married and unmarried states: the former from the ascetics’ attack; the latter from the patriarchal bondage of marriage, enforced child-bearing and motivations for maintaining family inheritance - each of which must be directed to giving devotion to the Lord as Paul himself exemplified (Murphy-O’Connor 1979, p. 74). However, when the papacy uses this passage to construct an iconic resemblance between celibacy and priesthood, it not only contradicts the moderating intent of the author, it also eschews marriage as a state from which a Christian can give devotion to the Lord. Moreover, the construction of this image exposes the danger of isolating details of history that are shaped by social specificities and applying and reifying them in contemporary contexts, which are shaped by different social concerns.

Despite the papacy warning priests that the priest is “not [to] use the Word of God to carry out his personal projects, nor even – with supposed good intentions – to help change a situation according to his own viewpoint,” several priest respondents commented on this Pauline passage (John Paul II 1990, n. 3). Fr. Mark considers that *because there was no exclusive love in [Paul’s] life, he was therefore available*

¹⁰² “Since [Paul] made love the basis of the christian life (13.2), Paul cannot see involvement with another person as a distraction from the affairs of the Lord” (Murphy-O’Connor 1979, p. 74).

and free. Yet, Fr. Mark also points out that contemporary clergy of other denominations make themselves freely available regardless of being married. Fr. Tim further elaborates on his confrere's argument:

We hear also the practical argument that a priest is more available to people as a celibate than as a married person. If this were true, priests would be known as more accessible than other professionals. But it is simply not the case. Nor is it true to say that most priests are busier than family men. In any one week it is possible that any number of other professional people can have far more appointments than a priest. They can also manage to integrate their different roles.

Fr. Jude also comments that it was the Apostle Paul's counsel to be celibate, not Jesus', therefore reducing the importance of Paul's counsel. For according to 1 Cor 7:7, the Apostle Paul states, "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind", a verse the papacy minimises in its proof for celibacy. Paul therefore is not considered an important exemplar of celibacy for those priests I interviewed.

Priest respondents also contributed general arguments about the way in which scripture should and should not be used. Several priests consider that the scriptures are formulations made by people who were trying to understand God and their relationship with God, and any rigid interpretation obviates that search for meaning. One scholarly-minded priest contends,

The more we investigate hermeneutics the more we realise how much the scriptures are a product of their authors, as are the traditions of the church. This does not mean they are not inspired by God. It does mean though, we are not dealing simply with absolute universal propositions of revelation, but include much more human thought and utterances.

While the papacy might assert an unequivocal resemblance of Jesus and Paul with celibacy and priesthood, priest respondents are constructing different meanings that take into account an appreciation of history and their own cultural conditions. Moreover, instead of searching for answers about celibacy and sexuality in transcendent notions of the divine, these priests appear to be looking to a more incarnate notion of God. Within this latter idea, historically conscious priests hunt

for God through the experiences and exigencies of their lives which, they argue, indicate the need for a tolerance of sexual pluralism in the priesthood.

The Papacy's Attempt to Make New Iconicities

Biblical scholars who have given strict exegetical, yet alternative, interpretation to Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7 have jeopardized the papacy's iconicities of celibacy. The papacy, however, in believing that celibacy is God's will for the priesthood, is not unduly daunted. Convinced that God is benevolent in this matter, the papacy has looked elsewhere in the New Testament to find a new basis for celibacy and, subsequently, two scripture verses have been appropriated. The first text quoted by the pope refers to the apostles: "they *'left everything* and followed him' (Lk 5:11; cf. Mt 4:20, 22; Mk 1:18, 20)." The second refers to "Peter who remembered this aspect of the apostolic vocation and to Jesus: 'We have *given up everything* and followed you' (Mt 19:27; Mk 10:28; cf. Lk 18:28)" (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). The papacy not only selectively interprets scripture by insisting that the apostles gave up their wives, children, parents and homes, but also makes these claims of similarity - imperfect but recoverable - for the contemporary priesthood,

According to the Gospels, it appears that the Twelve, destined to be the first to share in (Jesus') priesthood, renounced family life in order to follow him. The Gospels never speak of wives or children in regard to the Twelve, although they tell us that Peter was a married man before he was called by Jesus ... These observations help us to understand the reason for the Church's legislation on *priestly celibacy* (John Paul II 1993, p. 11).

Critical analysis of this iconicity of celibacy throws into doubt the definitive claims of the papacy for the apostles' post-conversion celibacy. As with Jesus the Jew, the apostles were obliged to marry and there is no evidence to suggest they did otherwise, or that they later left their families in the permanent sense that the papacy advocates; for "in the Mediterranean, present and especially past, the focal institution of the various Mediterranean societies has been and is kinship. The family is truly everything" (Malina 1993, p. 30). Malina goes on to say, "success in life means maintaining ties to other persons within sets of significant groups. The central group in this set is one's kinship group." In keeping these pivotal values of the first-century world in mind, Jesus and the apostles would have had to keep an honourable

connection to the entire family in order to ensure the success of their mission. If they had *left everything* as the papacy asserts, it would have fundamentally damaged the ministry of Jesus' and the apostles. The effectiveness of the papacy's iconicity can only be maintained for the unaware and those who chose to deny the validity of such exegesis. This and other iconicities are an indication of just how effectively scripture can be stretched by those who have powerful and well-resourced interests in the Church, as does the papacy. Yet the papacy's retrievals remain imperfect and perhaps futile, as one scholarly priest indicated: "[celibacy] remains an option in the biblical data. It may or may not accompany the ministerial priesthood" (Hunt, 1968, p. 137). Fr. Paul puts it more bluntly: *You won't find support for celibacy in the scriptures.*

The papacy's rhetoric of nostalgic recovery is also dependent on downplaying alternative representations that can be found in the scriptures, because these images also challenge its exclusive selection. Firstly, the papacy does not give equivalent consideration to the two records of married bishops (1 Tim 3:2; 1 Tit 1:6), or Paul's demand: "Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas" (1 Cor 9:5). The first two verses are reduced by the papacy to "a phase in the Church's process of being organised and, one could say, of testing which discipline of the states of life best corresponds to the idea and the 'counsels' taught by the Lord" (John Paul II 1993, p. 11). The third scripture passage, however, is not acknowledged because the text used for scriptural citations by the papacy is based on the fifth century Latin translation of bible carried out by Jerome (347-420) (Allen 2002a). In Jerome's era, as mentioned in chapter five, Christianity gave extreme importance to sexual denial.¹⁰³ Hence, is not surprising that Jerome translated the word "wife" as "sister woman" which eliminates the idea of apostles' wives, but most biblical scholars agree that this term is a euphemism for "wife" (Vogels 1992, pp. 70-88). In effect, the papacy has reduced anomalies to mere process or waives them altogether. Favoured texts, on the other hand, are highlighted and promoted through privileged

¹⁰³ Rader (1983, p. 64) states, "nowhere is celibacy allotted such importance as in Christian writings of the third and fourth centuries C.E. Even in early popular belief there was the conviction that asexuality was necessary for the millennium. The plan for perfect Christian living, therefore, was based on a denial of sexuality which would return human nature to its prelapsarian state."

access to Catholic media, a forum that is inaccessible to priests with friends and others who wish to promote alternative representations of scripture. Nevertheless, the papacy's problem of constructing credible images of celibacy remains because strategies of resemblance remain elusive.

Yet, when suggestions are made to change celibacy, even by those who regard themselves loyal to the Church, this can be profoundly disturbing for both the pope and priest,

A friend of mine had just finished a 6-year term as full time vocations director for his diocese ... He's a believer in married clergy and says celibacy isn't working. His moment of glory was last year at a conference of German speaking vocation directors in Rome. They had a meeting with the Pope who asked them ... what was their solution to the priest crisis in Western Europe? My friend was next to Pope John Paul and said to him, one of the answers was relaxation of celibacy and the use of married priests. The Pope reacted immediately, threw his arms in the air and almost shouted "Impossible, impossible" - and then gave them a strong defence of celibacy.

The papacy has heavily invested in its iconicities of celibacy; to accept the veracity of alternative iconicities would undermine its entire position. Any threat to the celibate identity of priests arouses aggressive defence and in this case, the pope quite literally attacked the priest by vehemently rejecting his suggestion. Five weeks after the conference, this priest was removed from his position as vocations director because, according to my priest respondent, his Archbishop had been pressured by Rome *to get rid of him*.

A Priest in Love

Well trained in the craft of priesthood, priest respondents made it known that they are using the same iconic strategies as that of the papacy by informally constructing their own images from scripture. But they do so with one difference: priests with friends provide their representations with specific historical and social contexts in which they construct their particular representations. The following account examines one such selection, which is preceded by Fr. John's explanation that is intended to bolster the veracity and vitality of the image he presents. This priest found himself in a real dilemma: *confusion is reigning supreme for me as a newly ordained priest who loves*

his ministry but at the same time is deeply in love. Fr. John had been in a close friendship with Rebecca for eight years: she and I have always seen our relationship as being great mates. When I needed a shoulder to cry on it was hers and vice versa. But one day, his feelings for her changed,

Rebecca rang me to say she was coming back to Australia because her brother had died unexpectedly. I arrived late to the graveside and there she was comforting her father ... [For me], it was that moment when this great mate of mine became something much more. It was the moment I really fell in love with her. Rebecca and I had never before seen this in our relationship, but since the funeral our lives have grown together in a wonderful intimate relationship. However, it is a relationship highly condemned by the Church and the law of celibacy.

I later questioned Fr. John how his friendship with Rebecca affects his priesthood: *It has opened me to the enormous aspects of love, gentleness and compassion. Through her, I am able to experience so very deeply the beauty of the intimate God that has coloured the essence of my existence.* He then went on to give an example of why he values such love,

The other day I had to celebrate the funeral mass of a youth Suicide ...one of the toughest funerals for priests. Rebecca knew how I'd be feeling and in fact rang and gave me her love and support ...how valuable is this?! Many aspects of a priestly ministry can be so draining. You can literally feel your energy levels dropping. You are constantly giving out hope, compassion and love, to the grieving. It is simply only natural to want a little in return. Rebecca has been that in a very special way.

Fr. John however, laments over the difficulties of maintaining the secrecy of his friendship, so much so, that *sometimes it rips the heart out of me.* In his attempts to rationalize his relationship in the face of the law and the negative judgment of particular confreres and conversely, a number of close friends *who know, understand and accept our dilemma,* he reflects on the following scripture passage,

I listen intently to the words of our Lord in the Gospel of John, "I have come that you may have life and have it to its full (John 10:10). Priesthood touches for me the very heart of these words yet how much more enhanced are they through the very love that I now understand. Maybe one day these words will echo far more loudly and openly in the hearts of our priests and so in the

heart of our Church.

For Fr. John, celibacy denies him personal comfort and intimate support, which he considers is important to his personal and priestly well-being. His friendship with Rebecca, in contrast, energises and focuses his priesthood enabling him to more easily and generously minister to those in need, particularly in those events that require intense and compassionate care. Despite the hardships of maintaining his friendship, Fr. John upholds the value of his love for Rebecca, and is able to find a degree of resolution to his dilemma in the Johannine verse. This scripture verse, steeped in temporal depth and divine consolation, provides him with the desired image that meaningfully embraces both his friendship and ministry. Fr. John understands this meaning not just for himself, but proposes that if any person wants to have *life ... to its full*, then it should be made available to all. Moreover, Fr. John challenges the official understanding of tradition and Church scholarship by using scripture, not to exclude as the papacy does, but to include. He suggests that this image of inclusivity should speak to the ultimate concerns of priests and others so that they too might be inspired and energized by such faith.

From an exegetical perspective, this priest's selection of a fragment of a verse is of further interest because it is situated within a scripture passage (John 10:1-21) in which John the evangelist uses a monologue that concerns Jesus as the shepherd and the sheep gate. This discourse is an involved allegory that characterises Jesus as the gate through which persons have access to the sheep and the "good" shepherd, meaning that Jesus is the only source of salvation. Those who came before him, namely, the Jewish teachers and the tradition to which people first appealed are rejected as thieves (v. 8) (Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy 1989, p. 968). John presents Jesus as saying, "the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that *they may have life, and have it abundantly*" (v. 10) [Fr. John's emphasis]. This verse, read in the broader context of the scripture passage, may imply that Fr. John leaves unspoken his thoughts about the contemporary teachers of the Church. Perhaps he considers the papacy is the metaphorical thief who robs him of the veracity of the love that he and Rebecca have for each other.

Saints: Past and Present

The papacy constructs and promotes particular images of saints, which enable it to homogenize a priest's identity. These saints have been deemed by previous and current papacies as having led particularly holy lives. After their deaths, these religious ancestors have been declared as having a privileged place in heaven and, therefore, are worthy of veneration. By inserting them into the liturgical calendar, these saints provide implicit daily reminder to priests of past religious virtue.

Many of these saints have also been celibate, a historical item that maximises the homogenizing policy of the papacy. For example,

Between the year 1000 and the end of 1987, popes held 303 canonisations, including group causes. Of these saints, only 56 were laymen and 20 were laywomen. Moreover, of the 63 lay saints whose state of life is known for certain, more than half never married" (Woodward 1990, p. 335).¹⁰⁴

More recently, the papacy beatified a married couple that lived the last twenty six years of their marriage as brother and sister on the advice of a priest, whilst none of their four children ever married. Their two sons became priests, one daughter became a nun, and the other daughter embraced a life of consecrated virginity (McBrien 2003). The papacy, through this saint making process, chooses heroic candidates who are celibate, and generally overlooks those who are married and remain sexually intimate, and others in non-marital relationships. In doing so, the papacy is able to claim a remarkably high degree of celibacy in these selected past examples of virtue, thereby giving temporal depth to its doctrine and canon law. Contemporary priests are consequently required to give special reverence and emulate these saints with the implication that sexual intimacy conflicts with being a virtuous priest while celibacy upholds moral goodness.

Priest respondents reported that they regularly reflected on the lives of saints, according to the "The Proper of Saints, General Roman Calendar" as listed in their

¹⁰⁴ McBrien (1995, p. 1115) also states "that over 70 percent of the saints on the liturgical calendar are men and that, of the saints canonized in this century to the end of Paul VI's pontificate (1978), 79 percent are clergy, 21 percent lay, and a smaller percentage, women."

weekday missal. However, it appears they reject the homogeneous model of sainthood. According to Fr. David, *[in these readings] there is a whole plethora of sensitive and insightful human responses [that speak] to the mystery of our belief.* These priests see these saints as heroic individuals who have been shaped by different contexts: theological, historical and cultural. However, the fact that these saints are predominantly celibate is largely irrelevant to the priests I interviewed. Not one priest volunteered favourable comment about how these religious ancestors had previously helped him negotiate his celibacy. Although in one discussion, Fr. Peter offered learned thoughts about the friendship of St. Clare and St. Francis,

I have problems with using these historical examples because I don't think that relationships meant the same in the Middle Ages as they do now. Clare and Francis were pre-Freudian and our entire world is so dominated by psychology, by Freud, Jung, etc., that it is very hard for us to think in ways that are not Freudian, that are not relational in very specific ways. And I think what is happening now is quite different to what was happening in the past.

Fr. Peter does not believe that the friendship of Clare and Francis, located in another time and place, is very helpful for priests in the contemporary world. Psychology has had profound and far-reaching effects in modern intellectual culture. The ramifications and influences of these fundamental psychoanalytical concepts have, at least indirectly, affected all fields of enquiry about mankind, and to an extent, empowered individual priests. According to Jung, “all life is individual life, in which alone the ultimate meaning is to be found” (Singer 1972, p. 137). In this perspective, stereotypes and standardized systems dissatisfy the psyche.

Consequently, individuals are driven to search for ways that express their needs and talents. Such a search demands that the individual care for and embrace his or her innermost incomparable uniqueness. This ultimately implies becoming one's own Self (Anderson 1996, p.13). From a Jungian perspective, priests determine their identity by using different intellectual frameworks that are alien to those that were used in the past. Perhaps this explains why the generalized example of celibate saints is not helpful to particular priests in maintaining or restoring celibacy. Moreover, given that a number of these priests see their friendships as a way to realize their own wholeness and well being, it is doubtful whether the papacy's use

of past celibate exemplars can restore the belief once held by these priests in the value of celibacy.

Consequently, priest respondents are imaginatively constructing contemporary images to define their own identity. Fr. Aaron, for instance, attempted to live out the *ideal of loving everybody equally* and nobody in particular, but by the time he was given his third parish appointment, he had experienced numerous struggles with celibacy. In his new parish, he met Hanna with whom he felt he was compatible in so many ways: *she's close to my age, single and committed to her job, and is removed [from the parish situation]*. Fr. Aaron went on to say,

I knew this euphoria was called falling in love and that that emotion would not last forever but this set of circumstances had a lot going for it ... Loyalty to her was much more life giving and challenging than following a discipline of the Church. With a commitment to her, physical affection could be an investment in something long term. I could be a priest, be warm and open and know that there was a real person in this world that loved me and wanted my love and fidelity. I felt good and yes, even holy. This felt closer to God's plan than anything else I had experienced.

Several years passed but the fear of being found out undermined Fr. Aaron and Hanna's friendship: *The communication between us has practically disappeared*. Then one night,

I asked myself why do I love her. What does it mean for me to love her? Would I stop loving her if she stopped loving me? Was it about me or about her? After some tears, which flowed from the centrality of the questions, I felt the answer: I love her. I like loving her. It didn't matter what she said or did; love was in me and it was for her. It had no conditions. This I realised as I answered my own questions, is what God feels for us. This is unconditional love. It was, I believe, the most significant spiritual experience I have had. To glimpse within myself the love God has for us. I thought of the song from Les Miserables: "to love another person is to see the face of God."

In the struggle to find new and relevant images, Fr. Aaron understands that he came to know God more intimately. Subsequently, he reframes his approach to pastoral care,

Ministry is now a matter of waiting for life to bring me people who have lost connection with their wholeness. Fear of misunderstanding is often the obstacle. Rules are seen as God's wishes, and breaking them, a ticket to punishment. My experience questions these naïve connections. I ask them questions about these assumptions and allow people to question themselves. I ask them to look at Christ and how he treated people and how he reacted to certain situations. I get them to look at the Church: its limitations, its motivations, its intentions. Hopefully they leave me with a new direction, that they can be themselves, be loving and be loved by people and are most certainly loved by God.

When a priest finds a meaningful image, which in this case is integrated and drawn from an expression of a locally situated experience, it can have a powerful effect on how he negotiates his identity and consequently lives out his life and ministry. Fr. Aaron selects a verse from a contemporary musical and adapts it to his personhood and priesthood, and in doing so, produces an image that speaks into his heart. In this particular iconic process, this priest's notion of celibacy, reconfigured and enhanced by his experience, is now understood to be about rules, while his sexually intimate friendship is about *see[ing] the face of God*. This case suggests that iconicities drawn from experience have greater power for the individual concerned, than iconicities that are abstract and produced at a distance. Fr. Aaron's iconicity, therefore, has significant ramifications for the production of iconicity, for it illustrates that the papacy does not have sole control over the sources of images that are used by priests. Therefore, if the papacy cannot deliver meaningful iconicities of celibacy that speak to a priest's experience, from which he can draw an understanding that is similar to the papacy's but which is also his own, then a priest may look elsewhere.

The Iconicity of Fatherhood

We often locate an understanding of our identity within our family, a feature that the papacy has recognized and taken advantage of to maintain a particular form of social cohesion in the Church. By demanding celibacy, priests are prevented from having family attachments, which enables the papacy to substitute members of the Church as kin. Kinship recognition cues are then implemented such as priestly association, confraternal familiarity, and kinship-evoking language. One example of the latter is reflected in the socially ingrained habit of priests who commonly address each other

as “Father.” This paternal address effectively creates a sense of belonging to a priestly family rather than a biological family, a prioritised domestic association that contributes to the maintenance of formal control over priestly identity and, concomitantly, celibacy.¹⁰⁵ This ranking of family is also recognized and supported by those Catholics in the wider Church, as is evidence by Fr. Adam’s report. After Fr. Adam’s ordination, his own mother from then on addressed him only as “Father,” and treated him as such. He then went on to say how at Christmas time, his brothers and sisters would be given a variety of gifts, while he regularly receives a white shirt and handkerchiefs, a gift his mother considered befits a priest.

The model of family promoted by the papacy is based on a form of patriarchy. In this social system, the papacy is recognized as having sole control of domestic, public and political authority within the Church. This paternal dominance is upheld in part by the use of images of “spiritual fatherhood.” For instance, God is said to resemble an omnipotent male parent who is implicitly celibate, and is formally referred to as “The Father” or “Our Father ...”¹⁰⁶ This patriarchal resemblance is also replicated in the hierarchy. At the apex of the Church resides its head, the Pope (from the Greek *pappas*, meaning, “father”) who is referred to as “The Holy Father,” the definitive and morally perfect male celibate leader who oversees all other “Fathers.” Next, in a lower rank, are the bishops, who are regarded as *paterfamilias* (from the Latin, transliterated as “father: head of the family”) to their priests. Lower still in rank is the priest who is referred to in everyday discourse as “Father.” As well, the use of capitalization in each of these familial representations, which indicates a proper noun, suggests that God, a pope, a bishop and a priest is no ordinary father, but *the* Father who should be regarded as special, superior and set apart from biological and other fathers. Thus, from the papacy’s perspective, “Father” in its various forms becomes expressive of a priest’s entire being; his identity completely prescribed in celibate particularity.

¹⁰⁵ Other kin terms include those given to religious, namely, “Brother,” and “Sister.” Abstract entities also reflect familial terms such as “Mother Church,” and “Mother Mary,” which are commonly used in Catholic parlance.

¹⁰⁶ “Our Father ...” are the opening words to the Lord’s prayer, frequently said publicly and privately in various rituals such as the Eucharist and the Rosary.

Parishioners who address a priest as “Father” also give ultimate acknowledgement to the patriarchal order of the Church, because in this salutation they imply they are “children,” willing to be submissive and obedient to “Father’s” authority. However, in some cultures, particularly Western cultures, which no longer accept men as the sole authority within the family and society, this “Father” image is increasingly being challenged. Firstly, women and children in these cultures generally have civil, property and legal rights that veto the presumption of male dominance. Secondly, in Western families, a father and mother often regard the role of parenting as a mutual and equitable responsibility that is to be shared. Thirdly, an increasing number of women act as both the private and public head of the household because of a father’s absenteeism. Fourthly, some lay Catholics desire an adult relationship with priests, but the “Father-child” image frustrates their aspirations. Consequently, the papacy’s use of male celibate resemblance for a priest is being increasingly rejected, and regarded by increasing numbers of Catholics as patronizing and sexist.

In the context of the priesthood, some priest respondents also recognize the problems of the “Father” image, as indicated by Fr. Peter: *the hierarchy breeds’ infantilism*. Fr. James argues, *the structures have domesticated us and keep us docile*. These priests feel locked into their “Fatherhood”; sandwiched between deference to the “Holy Father” and paternal responsibility to their parishioners, who are becoming less likely to acknowledge them as “Father.” Nevertheless, Fr. Luke, through his friendships with women, has identified a new familial image that he considers much more suited to his personal and pastoral circumstances. Previously, Luke held rigid ideas about being “Father,”

Until I came to enjoy particular friendship, I was a person who was fairly self-sufficient and assured about life. It wasn’t just that I didn’t need women, I didn’t need people, period. I wasn’t unpleasant to people, in fact I was very popular. For me, a priest was the strong person, the priest was the leader, the priest had studied all these books, he knew all the answers and he was Father and was to lead the children.

Being “Father,” assured Luke of his priestly identity and shored up self-sufficiency. In hindsight, however, he admits he was *task-orientated*. *Relationships complicated life. Relationships made it difficult to get the job done*. His curriculum vitae added

weight to his work ethic, which lists an impressive summary of educational qualifications, pastoral skills and important positions on a large number of committees. Yet, throughout the past ten years, he has enjoyed two serially monogamous friendships with women that have fundamentally changed his attitude. Luke saw how these women complemented his personality, and how much *he needed people, not just women, but others too. I see them as people who are on my side, so to speak, which I wouldn't have always seen that way. I just treat women as equals and appreciate their intuitive perspective, which is a wonderful perspective, because I tend to be cerebral.* These friendships impress upon Luke the contribution that other people could make to his life and ministry. Such experience, again located in the local circumstance, has consequently reconfigured his particular iconic representation of family. Subsequent analysis and ethnographical evidence continues to chart that change in Luke's life and ministry, an understanding that he uses rhetorically to make his case for the reform of celibacy.

Luke considers that his seminary training and subsequent years in the priesthood have shaped his previous priestly stance: *you stood alone and on your own merit.* Furthermore, priests were trained to be intellectually proficient: *we could think clearly, speak clearly but we were not in touch with our feelings.* Luke then commented on the superficiality of communication between his confreres and admits: *I didn't even know what friendships were, particularly deep friendships because I never had much of an experience of them.* Up until he met his first friend, he had related professionally to his confreres, acquaintances and parishioners rather than personally. These women, however, had helped him,

... balance out my development and I think I am far more in touch with my feelings now than I have ever been. I also have an understanding and appreciation of my abilities better than I've ever had in my life before. And that's including my weakness as well. In learning to feel at home with these women, and having to share myself with them, I have learned to feel much more at home with myself.

I am also much more aware of the endemic discrimination against women, especially in the Church, because of the attitude of superiority on the part of the male leaders of the Church. I wasn't aware of my own discrimination until gradually I became aware of it through these women challenging me. So now, I've

become aware of women and value them and their contribution to my own personal life. So my particular friendships have been a wonderful enrichment of myself and in both cases, they have also been the enrichment of my partners.

While Luke still considers this priestly training residually affects him, because *it's hard to change the spots and habits of a lifetime*, he is

... very aware of what it means to relate at a head level and what it means to relate at a heart level. There's a vast difference. Now my relationships tend to be warm and spontaneous and easy, personal rather than professional, so to speak. I'm now a "brother" in the human family. When I started off I was a Father in the human family, now I'm a brother. You know, walking amongst the equals, journeying together so to speak. Not just the journey of faith, but the journey of life itself.

Luke, a highly capable priest, full of the zeal for ministry discovered another way of being a priest through his friendships. His friendships complemented his own personality, which he describes as being overly intellectual and lacking in sensitivity and intuitive awareness. These women also challenged his clerical attitude towards their gender and made him aware of the importance and value of their involvement in society and Church, which according to Luke is unrecognised and undervalued. These friendships over time eroded his sense of ascendancy over people to such an extent that he now considers himself mutually connected with others in the *human family*. Luke has simultaneously reconfigured his kinship relations and changed his identity. The journey through life is now a shared, holistic activity, and as a companion on that journey, Luke considers that it is more appropriate to understand himself as *brother* rather than *Father*.

The Status of the Papacy's Iconicity of Celibacy

While the papacy's commitment to celibacy as a non-negotiable characteristic of a priest's identity is strongly resistant to critical erosion, priests with friends and biblical scholars are working to limit the papacy's powerful control by using alternative scholarly images that subsequently damage its truth claims. The papacy, however, is scornfully dismissive of these alternative iconicities and determinedly asserts celibacy, at least on the face of it, as a permanent fixture on the present and future landscape of the priesthood,

The synod does not wish to leave any doubts in the mind of anyone regarding the Church's firm will to maintain the law that demands perpetual and freely chosen celibacy for present and future candidates for priestly ordination in the Latin Rite (John Paul II 1992, p. 56).

Nonetheless, the danger for the papacy lies in iconicity itself. Although the contingent character of the papacy's present arguments is conventionalised in doctrine, celibacy remains true only under the conditions where the iconic relationship between celibacy and priesthood can be sustained. And conditions are changing. Consequently, the papacy is required to create new and effective iconicities to maintain the celibate identity of the priesthood. This need is well recognized by priests such as Fr. James: *It's the images and expectations of celibacy – [they] don't provide celibates with a meaningful explanation for their lives and in the larger Christian community, they don't provide reasons to appreciate why priests are celibate.*

The problem for the papacy lies in the fact that to create iconicities of celibacy, resemblance must rest on the possibility of difference and if that difference is not sustainable, then the retention of celibacy is jeopardised. Therefore, if priests do not recognize celibacy as being meaningfully different from the sexual status of other Catholics, then celibacy as an ideal is abandoned. This is the view of priests with friends who effectively locate themselves in an egalitarian community, and in that commonality they do not recognize any value in being set apart or being superior to others, as reflected in celibacy.¹⁰⁷ Instead, they argue that the characteristic qualities of their intimate friendships appropriately resemble the qualities of priesthood and more broadly, Christianity. Meaning is realized in the quality of their intimate relationships, both with their friends and others, while its contrast is measured against those people who refuse or are hesitant in attaining or sustaining love, loyalty and commitment in relationships of mutuality and equality. Indeed, priests with friends are constructing new iconicities. In re-imaging their identities, these priests unmask the shadow-side of differences that the papacy's iconicity of celibacy

¹⁰⁷ Theologically speaking, priests with friends often acknowledge that their priesthood is located in baptism, and out of that commonality with other Catholics and Christians in general, they seek to serve, not set apart from the community but at its heart.

endeavours to conceal, subsequently leaving its theology and practice implausible and lacking credibility.

Yet, in stark contrast to priests with friends, the papacy is supplied with a vast array of resources that it uses to continue its policy of celibacy. One of the tactics employed by the papacy is the careful screening of orthodox and often ambitious clerics who are encouraged to develop scholarship that confirms the validity of iconicities upon which claims for celibacy rest. These scholars selectively choose tracts from ancient and contemporary manuscripts to furnish supposedly irrefutable evidence about the celibate identity of priesthood, which intentionally ensures the continuation of the papacy's cherished beliefs. This exclusive material is then widely promoted, as exemplified by the Congregation of the Clergy's web site. In a file titled, "Other documents," articles are entirely devoted to promoting seemingly indisputable rationales for the practice of celibacy from the perspective of multiple disciplines.¹⁰⁸ The papacy also protects its iconicities of celibacy by silencing or revoking teaching licences of dissident priests and theologians who promote alternative views of celibacy and sexuality.¹⁰⁹ These licences are needed for teaching in seminaries or ecclesiastical faculties and without them, alternative opinions and experiences cannot be formally presented to those who are training for the priesthood. Similarly, local individuals and groups who endeavour to have their concerns about celibacy and related issues heard by the hierarchy are suppressed.

Nevertheless, the papacy's strategy of fixing and eternalising iconicities through the repetition of its mantra - "celibacy is a gift of God" - is proving to be ineffective, for recognizing and questioning these resemblances is a part of the dialectical process by which mankind seeks for a better understanding of the truth. For the papacy to insist

¹⁰⁸ For example: Celibacy: the view of a Zen monk from Japan; *Coeli beatus*: Observations of biologist; An Oriental Church returns to unity choosing priestly celibacy; Priestly celibacy and problems of inculturation; Priestly celibacy in the light of medicine and psychology; Priestly celibacy in patristics and church history [http://www.clerus.org/clerus/index_eng.html].

¹⁰⁹ For example: US priest, Fr. Joseph Breen was silenced in 1992 for publicly urging the American bishops to deal with celibacy in light of the shortage of priests; US moral theologian Charles Curran had his teaching licence removed in 1986 because of his dissenting views on a number of Church teachings; US theologian Fr. Matthew Fox was dismissed in 1996 for his views on women priests, homosexuality and creation spirituality; US feminist theology professor, Sr. Carmel McEnroy, was removed from her position in 1995 for signing an open letter to Pope John Paul II calling for women's ordination to priesthood.

that all priests must completely identify with celibacy is to suppress that search, a quest that is being pursued by priests with friends and expressed in their opinions and practices. Consequently, if the papacy continues to ignore the rhetoric of these priests who know perfectly well that they are not celibate, it is at the papacy's peril. Nonetheless, there is a brake to that search: iconicity remains a powerful tool; celibacy is still required for priests.

Another problem for the papacy is the tension between difference and sameness that underlies any claim to the homogeneity of celibacy, and this leaves its claims potentially open to eventual disintegration. In recognizing this danger, the papacy strives to control the ascribed meaning of celibacy, and it does so by encasing it in a rhetoric of rigid taxonomy. In order to protect its principles of sexual classification, which hierarchically separates priests from the laity, the papacy must ensure that bishops and priests uphold the ideology of celibacy. One example of this restraint occurred at the European Bishop's Synod,

The Vatican Curia withheld a number of controversial issues from the discussion platform during the course of the European Bishops Synod ... one of them being the subject of 'married priests'. "We bishops and our advisers, have had comprehensive discussions on these practical matters, but there is an oppositional lobby of Curia Bishops."... The synod participants had formulated various proposals following long working group discussions, but the Curia members, very shrewdly divided over the various working groups were able, by virtue of their veto rights, to prevent these issues from figuring among the ultimate conclusions presented in the definitive synod document ('British Bishop complains about Vatican Curia's 'oppositional lobby' during the European Bishops Synod' 1999, p. 23).

Manipulating representation, exercising prohibition, and imposing silence, are tactical devices that contribute to the papacy's maintenance of celibacy. The papacy reconstitutes what may be an impossible condition in one sense as a fundamental truth in another. This paradoxical condition is being recognised by bishops who are frustrated by the ordinary and everyday experiences and exigencies in their dioceses where *management choices seem to lie somewhere between giving up the ideal of priest-as-pastor and closing one-third of the parishes in the [United States] ... [This]*

reality holds true across the developed world ('Costs of Clerical Celibacy are Rising' 1999, p. 15).

More specifically, significant numbers of bishops are factoring into their management decisions: illness, resignations, retirements, deaths and very few younger priests coming into the ranks. While these bishops acknowledge the reasons for the priest shortage are complex and cannot be reduced to a simple reaction against celibacy, what is clear is that retention of the canon renders impossible the most obvious solution – the ordination of married men and, many would argue, women. Meanwhile, the Curia maintains that celibacy is a fundamental truth located in God's will. Moreover, these papal representatives endeavour to protect this view by selecting for influential positions, those who have the same belief. Priests, for example, who support optional celibacy, will not be made bishops,¹¹⁰ and similarly, bishops who speak out through word or deed are reprimanded, over-looked in the selection for key positions, and ultimately removed from their dioceses, if they are not forced to resign.¹¹¹

The papacy's strategies of control ostensibly background the figurative character attributed to celibacy. Yet, the validity of the papacy's rhetoric of celibacy is subject to the evidential rules in which these iconicities are formulated. In view of the evidence presented here, it appears that the effectiveness of the papacy's iconic constructions is becoming increasingly unconvincing. As Fr. Jim argues, *no longer is the word of Church leaders unquestioned because of the authority of their office; they have to convince people with arguments or the compelling power of their witness*. Moreover, the rhetorical force of iconic correspondences resides in their being perceived and accepted by a particular audience as somehow natural.

¹¹⁰ In a leaked document covered by the "pontifical secret," the papacy sets out criteria for choosing a suitable candidate for the episcopate, which includes, "Discipline – fidelity and obedience to the Holy Father, the Apostolic See, the hierarchy, esteem and acceptance of priestly celibacy, as it is presented by the Church's Magisterium; respect for the faithfulness to the norms concerning divine worship and ecclesiastical dress" (Hebblethwaite 1995, p. 8).

¹¹¹ Bishop Eamon Casey of Ireland fathered a child, as did Bishop Hansjorg Vogel of Switzerland, and Archbishop Eugene Marino of Atlanta and Archbishop Robert Sanchez of Santa Fe were sexually involved with women, and ultimately resigned. In 1995, Bishop Jacques Gaillot of Evreux, France, refused to resign and was removed from office after he publicly supported a married clergy, advocated the use of condoms to prevent AIDS, and expressed willingness to bless homosexual unions (Reese 1996, pp. 247-48).

Therefore, if priests accept celibacy as being natural, the canon will remain. However, if priests represent other resemblances as part of the natural order, then the moral rejection of celibacy proceeds as a matter of course, a process that has been acknowledged by one bishop in his assessment of celibacy: *if we have the choice between having a sign and having priests, then let us have priests. A sign which does not in fact function specifically and psychologically as a sign seems to these bishops to be an ideology: a suspect sign* (Schillebeeckx 1985, p. 223).

In places such as Latin America, Asia and Africa, celibacy is contrary to the customs of the people.¹¹² In Western cultures, celibacy is also being contested. Priests and laity are generally brought up in a participative democracy that promotes equal employment opportunities, and the importance of sharing roles and responsibilities in relationships. These Catholics are, therefore, hardly likely to value iconic representations that essentially promote an autocratic system upheld by passive child-like participation, sexual discrimination in vocations, and discriminatory divisions in relationships. In effect, the tension between the idealized past of celibacy and the experienced present is being built up to critical proportions under the combined efforts of priests with friends, dissidents and reformers, disenchanted Catholics, and those concerned about the shortage of priests. For the former individuals and groups, celibacy is viewed as a form of religious imperialism that can only work against the papacy. The papacy, on the other hand, has to convince these Catholics otherwise.

Conclusion

In this chapter, attention has been focused on how an individual is positioned in a social order through identity. Identity is formed by images that have been iconically constructed, a process that has been studied from the perspectives of both the papacy and priests with friends. The papacy and each priest with a friend use iconicity to create particular representations that are rhetorically employed to promote their respective arguments: for and against a celibate identity for the priesthood. Firstly,

¹¹² For example, “the whole Andean culture is built around the concept of the *pareja*, the couple. Everything goes in couples – animals, the sun and the moon. There are even two mountains, male and female. The word for a single guy is *mula*, a mule” (Rice 1991, p. 163). In this culture, a man who is not married is not considered a worthwhile leader of his community.

the papacy, from its powerful and authoritative position at the apex of the Church, promotes its arguments for a uniform celibate identity for the priesthood by predominantly constructing images from structurally nostalgic sources that reflect Edenic perfection. By using representations from the past, which evoke notions of absolutism and eternity, the papacy argues that celibacy can be the only legitimate and authentic identity for the priesthood. This bolsters the papacy's understanding that its belief system and hierarchical order is therefore superior, indeed, incommensurable to that of priests with friends.¹¹³ Confident that it has nothing to learn from priests with friends, the papacy claims a monopoly on truth. Thus, the papacy considers that priests with friends only legitimate attitude and action is to defer and be obedient to its teaching, which demands celibacy

Meanwhile, priests with friends also vie for a paradisaic share in Eden in which to enjoy their friendships, and they do this by constructing their iconicities through the immediacy of their experience. These priests factor into the detail of their present thoughts, feelings, and wishes, diverse interpretations of exemplary ancestors, passages of scripture, and familial models from which they express rhetorical representations that are used to construct their images of priestly identity.¹¹⁴ By taking into account the complexities and contingencies of their lives, priests with friends crystallise their understandings into iconicities that are meaningful for their particular lives and ministries. Moreover, these representations are inherently dynamic and are frustrated by the uniform images that are used and imposed by the papacy. Therefore, when official iconicities cannot be meaningfully processed through experience, these priests reconfigure those iconicities to maintain their priesthood or look to other sources of inspiration to rhetorically construct a relevant priestly identity.

Priests with friends contend that there should be more than the one relational option available for their confreres and themselves in the priesthood. The iconicities of these priests, therefore, have the ability to transform the priesthood's uniform policy

¹¹³ This analytical process is very similar to that described for science by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Kuhn's approach to science is historical and sociological, as compared to Popper for whom science is the apotheosis of sound and logical defensible thought.

¹¹⁴ There are some similarities in this analysis of experience with Victor Turner and Edward Bruner's *The Anthropology of Experience* (1986).

of celibacy to one that is pluralistic, and they promote this reform by starting from their local situation where change can be both worked both up and down the hierarchy. Thus, a dominant social group constructs static images from its prejudicial reading of the past, which bolsters and sustains its authoritarian position within society. However, when these images do not concur with those of subalterns, the latter create and promote representations that challenge homogeneity.

Celibacy is believed by the papacy to be a comprehensive practice that is unchanged and unaffected by history and culture, and no other correspondence can be entered into this official argument. The papacy further ensures this is the case by controlling formal communications in the priesthood, which makes it very difficult for priests with friends to petition their cause. These priests, however, continue to be a contradiction in the papacy's system of beliefs and hierarchical order, and their attempts to resolve their difficulties only increase tension between themselves and the papacy. Yet, without the possibility of resolving the dialectic between abstract and universal beliefs and experience in which belief is located, social dissonance in the priesthood and Church is likely to continue. This development is, however, not in the papacy's favour. As the crisis of celibacy continues, confidence in its practice will be further weakened thereby making room for other priestly identities. In chapter seven, I examine how formal images are made socially operative in stereotypes in which fixed conceptions of individuals and groups inevitably contribute to social dissonance in the priesthood and Church.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Control of Stereotypes

In the previous chapter, the way in which the papacy iconically constructs celibacy to formally control a priest's identity was presented. These images, however, can be further actualized in the broader Catholic context through the Church's belief system and Catholic media. In this dissemination process, these formal images are made socially operative in stereotypes. By linking a formal image to an individual or a group, the relationship is reduced to lexicographical parameters, which is socially expressed in oversimplified standardized images. Moreover, when Catholics in the broader social context give approval to that stereotype, it then moves into the realm of absolute knowledge. Once accepted as unequivocal, this fixed conception invariably allows for no differentiation or critical judgement. When the papacy claims superiority for the priesthood over other groups through the use of these reductive images, stereotypes become a lived reality for Catholics, priests and lay alike, who are consequently forced to live within homogenized social categories. Furthermore, these homogenized categories come together in a set of sexual stereotypes that are used to organize Catholics socially and familiarly in patriarchy. Thus, any attempt made by a priest to challenge the views of celibacy held by his bishop, provincial or confreres is limited in his efforts by each of these latter priests' local reading of these stereotypes.

In this chapter I turn my attention to the relationship between iconicities and stereotypes, which are unified in patriarchy. First I examine two iconicities constructed by the papacy, namely, Mary, the Virgin-Mother, and homosexuality to show how these images are the origin of stereotypical expression. I then demonstrate how these formal images have been socialized as oversimplified standardized images by the papacy and its local representatives. In this process, the Virgin Mary serves as a principal organizing image of the patriarchal Church that is used to justify the chastity of priests and keep women subservient and at bay. Conversely, homosexuality is constructed by the papacy as a contradictory image of patriarchy, which consequently obscures these people in the priesthood and Church. However,

only those who recognize the limits of oversimplified standardized images identify stereotypic inferiority. I demonstrate this by analyzing the rhetoric of subordinated Catholics, including priests with friends, homosexual persons and dissident women. Finally, I show how stereotypes limit a society by undertaking an overview of these culturally intimate resistances and the problems these stereotypes ultimately produce.

The Iconic Construction of Mary

By imaging God primarily as male and Jesus as revelatory confirmation of the maleness of God, the papacy is able to confirm that maleness is divine and, therefore, normative for leadership in all social and familial dimensions of the Church. However, this iconic construction as expressed in a set of stereotypes that constitute patriarchy, creates unequal power between the sexes, which inevitably produces conflicts of interest and unconscious hostility. Previous papacies and the current papacy have harnessed this social consequence for their own purposes. By making Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus, into a supernatural female token, commonly referred to as the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, women can symbolically identify themselves with a supernatural feminine image. Yet, because Mary is subordinate to God the Father, the latter image being upheld and represented by the various priestly Fathers, whilst no women represent Mary, this contrived reversal continues to uphold patriarchy. Furthermore, such tokenism offers the bare minimum in compensation for women's loss of authority and power, but enables the papacy to channel conflict and tension experienced by woman towards the service of the hierarchical Church.

In order to formally regulate the image of an obedient and docile Mary in the divine family, the papacy supernaturalises the motherhood of Jesus through a prejudicial reading of scripture. By literalising the phrase, "the virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (Mt 1:23), the papacy is insistent that this reading is not only historical fact but expresses God's supernatural intervention in history. Moreover, because Mary has obviously been uniquely marked by divine favour, for no other woman can be physically a virgin and mother at the same time, she must be honoured by supernatural rank. Yet, this reading is contrary to what is said by the Gospel writers

who took the prophecy of the virgin birth from the Hebrew Testament (Is 7:14) to exalt the circumstances of Jesus' birth, not Mary's virginity.¹¹⁵ According to Crossan (1995, p. 23), "the virginal conception of Jesus [is] a confessional statement about Jesus' status and not a biological statement about Mary's body. It is a later faith in Jesus as an adult retrojected mythologically onto Jesus as an infant." In recognizing the importance of Jesus, the Gospel writers acted as media agents of the era where they had to compete with other claims of divinity.

Previous papacies and the current papacy have continued to treat the ancient propaganda of Mary's virginity and her supernatural motherhood as an historic event, which has a powerful effect on the official understanding of a priest's virginity and/or celibacy. Furthermore, the papacy officially re-interprets other anomalies that might contest its claim of a virgin-mother. For example, the papacy controls the explanation of biblical references to Mary's other children (Mk 3:33, 6:3; Mt 13:55) who are variously interpreted as stepbrothers and stepsisters or as male and female cousins. Mary's husband, Joseph, is also promoted as a virgin, and popularly portrayed as an old man, a double insurance that is intended to uphold the belief that he and Mary never had sexual intercourse. Thus, the papacy, an elite group of celibate males who have allegedly had no experience of sexual love, women's bodies, childbirth, and fatherhood, promulgates its image of Mary as a truism.

By reifying and essentializing the iconicity of Mary, the Virgin-Mother, the papacy is not only able to promote an impossible standard for women, which ensures that all women fall short of the ideal, it is also able to direct the sexual desires of priests away from those that it regards as less than perfect. Pope John Paul II, for example, frequently invokes Mary in various documents he addresses to priests, so that she might care for her priest-sons, and specifically for their celibacy,

Every aspect of priestly formation can be referred to Mary, the human being who has responded better than any other to God's call. Mary became both the servant and the disciple ... [who] was called to educate the one eternal priest [Jesus], who became

¹¹⁵ According to Crossan (1995, p. 17) the prophecy in Isaiah says nothing whatsoever about a virginal conception. It speaks in Hebrew of an *almah*, a virgin just married but not yet pregnant with her first child.

docile and subject to her motherly authority. With her example and intercessions the Blessed Virgin keeps vigilant over ... priestly life in the Church.

And so we priests are called to have an ever firmer and more tender devotion to the Virgin Mary and to show it by imitating her virtues and praying to her often
(John Paul II 1992, pp. 156-57).

The papacy is able to keep priests “docile and subject to ... authority” by enabling them to adore Mary as a virgin with passionate prayers and romantic meditations without posing any threat to their celibate virtue, for she is unavailable in fantasy having been stripped of all identification with sexuality. At the same time, the papacy provides an attentive supernatural and maternal guardian, to help priests tame their sexuality and protect themselves from temptations and sinfulness so that the papacy’s system and hierarchical order might be maintained.

The papacy not only has an investment in suppressing the direct use of priests’ sexuality; it also has specific interests in manipulating women’s sexuality. By promoting its iconicity of Mary, the Virgin-Mother, as a model for all women, the papacy is able to call all women to be mothers, either physically or spiritually (Johnson 2000, p. 10). Indeed, the papacy states “virginity and motherhood [are the] two particular dimensions of the fulfilment of the female personality” (John Paul II 1988, n. 17). Only through the gendered role of motherhood in the context of marriage or religious life, a relationship headed and disciplined by a patriarchal male, can a woman use her sexuality. In deductive contrast, a woman cannot use her sexuality in the context of a relationship with a priest, because she cannot marry her friend and furthermore, the priesthood does not directly rely on biological mothers to maintain unilineal descent in the priesthood.¹¹⁶

However, according to the papacy, a woman, through her “selfless gift of femininity” can be a “sister,” while implicitly asserting that sexually intimate friendship is selfish

¹¹⁶ In the case where a woman and a priest do produce children, the child (or children) is regarded as illegitimate and is often denied knowledge of its father. Secondly, the birth is officially kept a secret, *[although] these tales find their way along the clergy grapevine*. Holy Innocents, a support group for women who have children by priests, also provides further evidence for the treatment of these children. This group can be accessed through the Internet: <http://www.marriedpriests.org/HOLYINNOCENTS.htm> (16/10/2002).

and the woman concerned is wanton. Only in the sense of sisterhood, can a woman licitly “light up [a priest’s] human existence” but, with an extra word of caution, the papacy adds, “[in this] revelation they are in a certain sense set apart” (John Paul II 1995, p. 473). By constructing and idealising the asexual woman and prohibiting sexual relations by inventing a taboo of symbolic incest, the papacy ensures that priests formally maintain celibacy and women are subordinated in the ideological construct of patriarchy.

The papacy also similarly constructs this argument from the perspective of priests. It confidently asserts that “if the priest, with the help of divine grace and under the special protection of Mary, virgin and mother, gradually develops [a right] attitude towards women, he will see his ministry met ... on the part of women ... as sisters and mothers” (John Paul II 1995, p. 473). In the idealisation of celibacy, priests are required, with the help of God and Mary’s guardianship, to see these women as “sisters and mothers.” In doing so, priests will, according to the papacy, not desire either sexual intimacy with their female friends, thereby avoiding symbolic incestuous relations within the Catholic family. Moreover, by essentializing and reifying these iconicities, the papacy encourages universal and local hostility against priests with friends, whilst keeping the Church ill-informed of the advantages and values of these relationships.

The Patriarchal Ban on Homosexuality

By making pre-eminent the image of Mary as Virgin-Mother, the papacy not only restrains women through the manipulation of their sexuality, but also uses this image to implicitly control the sexuality of people who are homosexual. In the patriarchal order, these people are either pressured to marry or forced to remain celibate and direct their energies towards building up the Church by becoming spiritual “fathers” and “mothers.” Alternatively, they are ostracised because they contradict patriarchy. Homosexual relationships between men, for instance, challenge this social order because they no longer subject their sexuality to the papacy’s purposes for controlling descent in both the priesthood and Church. Neither do homosexual males fulfil their social task of privately and publicly controlling women, and in the case of lesbian relationships, a patriarchal male does not govern these partnerships. In effect, these same-sex relationships contradict and challenge the papacy’s hetero-

patriarchal order. Furthermore, these homosexual relationships cannot produce the next generation of Catholics necessary for social continuation. Indeed, the papacy argues that “homosexual activity” is sinful because it is incapable of transmitting new life (Ratzinger 1986, n. 7). In refusing to acknowledge any other forms of generativity that a homosexual relationship might produce, for example, social and familial service, the papacy is able to negatively stereotype these people, and demonise and denounce homosexual partnerships as unnatural. The papacy argues, “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is more or less a strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder” (Ratzinger 1986, n. 3).

To sustain the judgement that homosexual people are objectively disordered, the papacy selects particular scripture passages, which it stresses “must be [interpreted] in substantial accord with ... Tradition” (Ratzinger 1986, n. 5). Despite most theologians and biblical scholars asserting that scripture is the primary source of tradition and not the other way around, regardless of the historical and social contexts that have shaped the Church’s teachings about homosexuality, and by discounting contemporary exegetical methods, the papacy continues to interpret passages such as Gen19:1-11, Lev 18:22 and 20:30, and 1 Cor 6:9 to assert the immorality of “homosexual acts.” The first scripture passage refers to the story of Sodom in which “the men of Sodom, both young and old” (v. 4) seek to sexually abuse the two guests of Lot. According to The Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Task Group (1997, p. 42) it is generally accepted by Christian and Jewish scripture scholars that these inhabitants primarily committed sins of pride, wealth, failure to welcome visitors, and fornication: a list that does not include homosexuality.

In texts that also add “forbidden sexual behaviour” to this list of sins, reference is often given to Lev 18:22 to legitimize this addition (Clifford and Murphy 1989, p. 23). This latter passage is a part of the Jewish Holiness Code, which was used to counter idolatrous practices that included male temple prostitution, a common practice of some of Israel’s neighbours at that time (McNeill 1993, p. 57). While the papacy has generally abandoned the Holiness Code, the papacy arbitrarily uses this passage to denounce and demonise homosexual persons. Moore (1992, pp. 41-42)

adds yet another perspective: Israel was a patriarchal society in which men were regarded as superior to women. For a man to take on the passive role in sexual intercourse was to take on the woman's role and thereby demean himself and all other men, and in doing so, subvert the social order. Moore's insight adds to a contemporary explanation as to why homosexuality is not permitted in the papacy's sexual organization of the Church: patriarchy demands that men retain dominance over women who are required to be sexually submissive and become child-bearers.

The papacy also uses the Pauline text, 1 Cor 6:9, to support its teachings on homosexuality even though contemporary exegesis casts doubt on its use to denounce homosexuality. For example, while verses 9 and 10 list numerous activities that will prevent people from inheriting the Kingdom of God,

One [activity] has been variously translated as effeminate, homosexuals, or sexual perverts. The original Greek text reads *malakoi arsenokoitai*. The first word means *soft*, the meaning of the second word has been lost. It was used to refer to a *male temple prostitute* ... The early Church interpreted the phrase as referring to people of *soft morals*, i.e. unethical. From the time of Martin Luther, it was interpreted as referring to *masturbation*. More recently, it has been translated as referring to *homosexuals*. Each translator seems to take whatever activity that their society particularly disapproves of and use it in this verse (Dignity Canada n.d.).

Furthermore, some of these original references (perhaps all) may bear no similarity to contemporary lesbian and gay partnerships (Dignity Canada n.d.). Indeed, according to Stuart,

The very word 'homosexual' was coined in the nineteenth century and the idea that some people are oriented emotionally and sexually towards members of their own sex is quite a new discovery. Up until very recent times it was believed that all people were born oriented towards members of the opposite sex (1993, p. 2).

The papacy, in refusing formal scrutiny of its interpretations, is able to reify and essentialize its iconicities of homosexuality. These iconicities are consequently made socially operative in stereotypes, which ostracize homosexual people and their partnerships in the Church and priesthood, and at the same time, ensure that those

who wish to maintain faith and service, status and position, remain effectively closeted.

The Papacy's Use of Stereotypes

The papacy has iconically constructed patriarchal images and claimed an absolute and eternal right to impose these preconceived ideas on priests and others. At the apex of this set of stereotypes is celibacy, a claim that is promulgated from a position of theological privilege: "Celibacy, in fact, is a gift which the Church has received and desires to retain, convinced that it is a good for the Church itself and for the world" (Congregation for the Clergy 1994, n. 57). The papacy makes celibacy synonymous with priests, thereby reducing these men to oversimplified standardized images. This is further exemplified in the papacy's condemnation of "affective deviations," a term used "to describe individuals with disordered sexual orientations – such as homosexuality or ongoing heterosexual activity – that are incompatible with priestly celibacy" (Rossini 2002). In the promulgation of these fixed conceptions, the papacy is able to reproduce and perpetuate celibate-sexual divisions in the priesthood whilst, at the same time, avoiding questions about celibacy and condemning outright any other sexual practice.

In consequence, priests are obliged to "behave with due prudence in relation to persons whose company can be a danger to their obligation of preserving continence or can lead to scandal of the faithful" (*The Code of Canon Law* 1983, p. 47). By reducing priests who have a friendship or a homosexual orientation to negative stereotypes, the papacy effectively blocks these priests by depriving them of opportunities to express alternative images and practices in the priesthood. Furthermore, if a priest does attempt to contest these stereotypes, the papacy and its representatives, again, through its use of stereotypes, questions this priest's understanding of morality. It likewise, suggests that he lacks the necessary capacity or essential attribute needed to uphold the total identity of the priest, inclusive of celibacy.

Moreover, the papacy ensures that its stereotypical practices are honoured in the local Church by giving each bishop the "authority to establish more detailed rules concerning this matter, and to pass judgement on the observance of the obligation in

particular cases” (*The Code of Canon Law* 1983, p. 47). Effectively, the local representative of the papacy is given unrestrained authority to take whatever measures are deemed necessary by him to sever a priest’s friendship, regardless of the local circumstances, the culture in which the priest ministers, or the commitments and responsibilities a priest has towards his friend. Furthermore, because homosexual priests and priests with friends are reduced to oversimplified categories, these episcopal bureaucrats can use their canonical licence to incite the local Catholic population into becoming instruments of repression that forcibly obstruct a priest from implementing changes to the sexual organization of the Church. Consequently, a priest is forced to accept, without question, stereotypes expressed socially by the papacy. As a result, priests and their friends are pressured to publicly relate to each other in a stereotypical manner, whilst the conventional denunciation of homosexual persons inevitably impacts on homosexual priests and their friends.

A Challenge to the Stereotype of Celibacy

Within the priesthood, priests with friends have a desire to contest the papacy’s use of stereotypes by challenging locally crafted repetitions of these social images. During my research, I asked six priests whether they had ever raised the issue of celibacy at formal gatherings of priests. Each priest responded in different ways because each had to evaluate what one priest referred to as *the spirit of the diocese*, an image that indicates that each diocese or religious order has a unique character. Yet, each priest who participates in that diocese or religious order contributes to that *spirit*. Through local involvement, a priest becomes knowledgeable in the ways that celibacy is being characteristically practised, which helps him to negotiate these distinctive stereotypical practices. Nevertheless, according to Fr. Mark, that *spirit* appears to mainly *revolve around the bishop, or a former bishop, so it’s revolving around the power issues of the Church*. Each of these priests must therefore take into account that the *spirit* is largely manipulated by local and powerful authority figures that are primarily responsible for the production of stereotypes. Fr. Mark goes on to say: *So much of it comes back to power and authority, it’s not so much about individual priests. [Effectively,] the hierarchy commandeers the spirit of the diocese [or religious order].*

According to Fr. Joseph, in his diocese, *the spirit* is relatively critical of celibacy: *There would be many that would talk about [celibacy] all right, and talk about the difficulties of it, and the loneliness of it. They wouldn't all speak, but a number would.* Fr Joseph indicates that the papacy's positive promotion of celibacy is being questioned and criticised, but he goes on to say that priests with friends *would be careful about the level of detail [they] would go to.* Within these formal gatherings, Fr. Joseph's local bishop, who has also spoken of his struggles with celibacy, has given consent to modified discussions that have resulted in *some fairly honest stuff [being said] that would be appropriate for the meeting.* While broad *permissions and opportunities to speak about that issue* have been given, Fr. Joseph is still wary about how much he is willing to talk about celibacy or his friendship. In his diocese, the stereotype of celibacy is being eroded, with *the spirit of the diocese* distancing itself from the centralized position of the papacy.

In another diocese, Fr. Luke indicates that priests talk *openly enough*, but that *they would talk about married priests rather than celibacy.* Fr. Luke's bishop has also allowed particular opportunities to discuss celibacy at formal gatherings of priests, where he and his confreres have shared with each other their lack of enthusiasm for its practice. Meanwhile, Fr. Luke hastened to add that celibacy is a valid and a valued choice for some priests, but he desires the option of another equally valid and valued choice, that of being married. However, with the adverse publicity given to clerical sexual abuse, Fr. Luke's bishop has since reneged on his previous position towards such discussions. This bishop has issued a notice of caution to his priests that they are not to be seen compromising their celibacy in any way. *In the present climate, he doesn't want problems of that particular kind,* said Fr. Luke. *[At the] moment he has a real problem of a particular court case¹¹⁷ and he wouldn't want it out in any way, that one of [his] priests [is] having a relationship. He would be very uneasy.*

Through defensive rhetoric, Fr. Luke's bishop is endeavouring to restore the damaged image of celibacy. Yet, if there is any chance of restoring this image, all priests must desire that restoration but there appears to be little private support for

¹¹⁷ One of the priests under this bishop's jurisdiction had been charged with sexual assault of a minor.

this aspiration. Fr. Luke went on to suggest that, although his bishop is demanding vigilance, perhaps it is time *to come to terms with his priests, that they have relationships like any normal human being*. However, the papacy and its local representatives are not promoting the idea that a priest is a *normal human being*. A priest is pressured by high expectations to surpass his humanity and take on transcendence by representing Christ. Nonetheless, when Fr. Luke claims his humanity, he challenges the stereotype that sets priests apart.

Fr. Samson commented at length on the politics that have shaped the *spirit* of his diocese. One of his confreres reported to a formal gathering of priests his concerns *that a lot of younger chaps aren't keeping [celibacy]*. Fr. Samson supported his confrere by saying, *we should very definitely talk about it because a lot of people are concerned and it's a big problem*. However, the bishop curtailed the attempts of both these priests to talk over the matter because *we have been told by Rome that this is not to be discussed*. So Fr. Samson said, *"OK, but could we signal in our minutes [to Rome] that a number of priests were very concerned and were certain it wasn't being taken very seriously by some of the younger ones and wanted it to be discussed but deferred to the ruling"*. The bishop agreed to the request. However, no mention of this concern was recorded in the minutes of the meeting: *It was just conveniently forgotten*. This bishop effectively exercised the power of his position as administrator to veto any mention of the question about celibacy.

Fr. Samson went on to share with me his disgust at the treatment given to these genuine concerns: *I knew it would be useless to talk to [the bishop] because he himself ... obviously ... didn't want to get into trouble with the authorities over him. He wanted to impress on them that he was doing a good job officially representing the Vatican in this neck of the woods, so he didn't want to be seen breaking rank or disobeying*. Nonetheless, this bishop undermined his local authority by uncritically subjecting himself and his priests' lives and ministries to the papacy. Such docile behaviour also lowered Fr. Samson's estimation of his bishop's leadership. I then asked him whether he thought his bishop was an ambitious man. At first, Fr. Samson did not think so but on closer reflection, he remembered an event that suggested this was the case,

I know that at a meeting before he became a bishop, he voted for himself when we elected the representative for the bishop's synod. We had to vote at our local deanery for one member...I was secretary, [and] I had to count the votes. I counted all the votes, and there was only one red pen in all that. I know that somebody had lent a red pen to him and he had written his own name in red... He was an ambitious man, [and] normally I don't think you would vote for yourself. So later, he became bishop.

Fr. Samson went on to describe his bishop as *a complete servant to Rome* who was prepared to use surreptitious self-promotion and ingratiating behaviours to ensure his ascendancy up the hierarchical ladder. This covetous behaviour, however, has come at a price. By abdicating his responsibility as a credible local leader, he has left the problems of his diocese unattended. Later in our conversation, Fr. Samson reported that his bishop *accepted celibacy because it came with the pattern of the priesthood [but] he didn't really agree with it*. This bishop not only undermined the local priesthood in order to fulfil his ecclesiastical ambitions; he also sacrificed his own integrity. While the rewards of his episcopal position may have compensated him for any perceived losses that he felt by practising celibacy, it failed to address the problems his priests were experiencing with celibacy and its consequences for their ministry.

Fr. Matthew, on the other hand, indicated that celibacy was not discussed at formal gatherings of his religious order, except when *[celibacy] would be the subject of one of the talks [but] it would be about reinforcing celibacy*. Fr. Matthew then said, *I think the only time it would come up, is if it were a cause of worry to the Council*. In this event, *the priest would have been spoken about in a very charitable and fraternal way. Not in a corrective way because you don't always know the facts*. Fr. Matthew, despite having a friendship, was of the opinion that *no matter what happens, it's still going to be part of religious life, which is distinct from the [diocesan] priesthood*. I then asked him about his Provincial's opinion of celibacy, and he went on to say that he could share news of his friendship with him and his confreres *to ease any fears they might have about it, [and] also to ensure them that there wasn't a problem*. Sharing news about the sexually intimate details of his friendship, however, would not be an item for discussion. Not having a *problem* also suggests that Fr. Matthew is prioritising his priesthood over his friendship and that he

would do nothing to harm the reputation of his religious order. More questions yielded comments such as, *[celibacy] is [a] fait accompli. It is not in our lifetime going change. And [while] there is a lot of discussion; this gathering of priests is not going to make any difference. Why bother.* While Fr. Matthew is in favour of celibacy for religious life, the irony is that he publicly promotes his intimate friendship in quite skilled ways, which suggests that he has not fully reconciled his position on the matter of celibacy.

Fr. Mark was quite emphatic that celibacy was not spoken about at any formal gatherings of priests in his diocese. *The only time in our diocese that celibacy would have been discussed would have been priests ...giving retreats, but there is no real discussion about it.* “But what about that priest who was known to be sexually promiscuous [with] married women,” I asked; “was that ever discussed at such a meeting?” Fr. Mark replied, *you hear much more about that from lay people than from priests. The priests are trying to keep that quiet. You just don’t talk about that.* While Fr. Mark considers celibacy should not be a pre-requisite for priesthood, he considers that the sexual behaviour of priests should not be discussed. Such incidences, he believes, should be dealt with great sensitivity and a minimum of attention so as to preserve the priesthood’s reputation: *You’ve got a public image that you’ve got to uphold and you would never allow that to impinge on any public discussion or public thought.*

I then proceeded to ask Fr. Mark what he thought the consequences would be if he did raise the subject: *If I brought up the issue, I think some of the guys would think that I am talking about them, and some of them who aren’t celibate don’t want it mentioned.* He also argues that *[sexuality] is something personal and private; ... there is a lot of emotion attached to it. There are certain things I have sorted out in my own mind [but] a lot of the priests have never sorted this out ... because a lot of them haven’t faced up to their own sexuality.* Fr. Mark does not want to embarrass any of his confreres by putting them in an uncomfortable position that forces them to speak on matters that they may not have resolved. He then elaborated on what he considered the mind of particular confreres: *[some] are caught between the laws of celibacy, which they would see binding in conscience, and [in] breaking that, they would feel ashamed about it.* For these priests, such matters should only be spoken

about in the confessional. Fr. Mark, therefore, contends that while celibacy exists in canon law, any attempts to deconstruct this issue should be governed by discretion and consideration.

Fr. Mark also comments on his bishop's attitude towards celibacy,

I don't think the basic issue is celibacy alone. You get some people like our bishop, who it has been said more than once, is basically a bachelor. And that is probably why [celibacy] has never been brought up [at our meetings]. A lot of it has to do with [priests] not just being celibates, but being bachelors, and bachelors will follow celibacy. It is always a solitary kind of thing, then it becomes a permanent fixture or attachment. Because they value their bachelorhood more than they value their friendship with somebody else.

Fr. Mark unravels a few of the local complexities that lie beneath the stereotype of celibacy. Effectively, celibacy allows certain priests to live life comfortably without having their choice of bachelorhood being publicly scrutinized. Moreover, because of his position in the hierarchy, Fr. Mark's bishop is able to manage his preferred life-style by imposing a degree of responsibility for its maintenance on his priests. By suppressing criticism of celibacy, his bachelorhood is secured.

Fr. Thomas, however, deduces yet another set of conclusions as to why it is difficult to talk about celibacy at formal gatherings of priests. When Fr. Thomas left the priesthood to marry, a number of his confreres chose to share their personal secrets with him. These disclosures challenged his original assumption that most priests *would like to marry but have not done so because of the required commitment to celibacy*. After reflecting on this privileged information, Fr. Thomas argues that these priests *seemed to be governed not by differing levels of commitment to celibacy, but by different combinations of sexual orientation, lifestyle preferences and circumstances faced*. Fr. Thomas then went on to say,

It had always puzzled me why the conversations of our group on mandatory celibacy rarely got anywhere. Now I could see why this had been so. We have not even known the fundamental issue of sexual orientation affecting each other. Not knowing this, nothing else followed. In contrast, the best conversations we had were when we, after so many years of disguising ourselves, had

been open. In these we could talk of our individual struggles and the cost of having to cover these to maintain expectations. Thus, we were able for once to establish our true differences. Ironically, we could also establish a great similarity, which was that we all wished to be able to relate our sexualities and the need for expression with our love for the priesthood and the Church.

When Fr. Thomas traded his central position in the priesthood for the marginal place of a married priest, he became privy to information that was not previously known to him. In openly challenging the stereotype of celibacy, Fr. Thomas effectively allowed his confreres to do the same in the privacy of cultural intimacy that circumvents the stereotypical façade. In particular, he discovered that a significant number of his confreres were homosexual, a negative stereotype in the papacy's understanding, which it uses to keep these priests closeted and the issue of celibacy off the table at formal gatherings of priests.

By imposing the singular, over-arching stereotype of celibacy, the papacy ensures that priests can use the patriarchal order to further their own interests, for example, through pursuing ambition or upholding a particular life-style preference. On the other hand, priests must continually make sacrifices of self that forgo heterosexual or homosexual relationships, in order to continue their priesthood. Again, in not allowing formal opportunities in dioceses and religious orders for these and other priests to acknowledge heterogeneous sexualities in the priesthood, the papacy ensures that the *spirit* of the diocese or religious order retains the official façade of celibacy. Because each priest's personal life and priestly ministry is formally and socially dominated by celibacy, local confreres cannot be open with each other about their friends or sexual orientation, or about their dreams and hopes for their priesthood. In keeping these priests separate, the papacy divides and conquers priests in each diocese and religious order, which ensures its ongoing control.

The Homosexual Challenge

While celibacy is not commonly discussed at formal gatherings of priests, homosexuality is totally off-limits, as is recognized by Fr. Thomas and similarly acknowledged by several priests: *[Homosexuality] would never, ever be discussed; that would be a real taboo; there has been not one word mentioned about gay priests. It's always covered up.* Nonetheless, the irony is that the priesthood is being

increasingly recognized as a *gay profession* in Western cultures, a view that is supported by estimates that homosexual men now make up anywhere between 30 and 50 per cent of young priests (Cozzens 2000, pp. 97-110). While entering the priesthood has been one way for homosexual men to avoid the stereotypical roles of husband and father, in recent decades the increased intake of homosexual seminarians has caused considerable alarm.

During my research, I listened to priests who sounded warnings about this trend, including Fr. Stephen, a homosexual priest himself: *They have to dehomosexualize the clergy. It's obvious because the proportion of homosexuals in the clergy is far too high ... priest numbers need to reflect the demography of the society it serves.*¹¹⁸ The papacy is also expressing its concern, but from a different perspective. Given that the papacy considers the homosexual orientation as “objectively disordered,” “The question of excluding homosexuals from the priesthood [has] been quietly considered at the Vatican for years without finding consensus” (Thavis 2002). According to media sources, that question is now receiving new and more urgent attention in the wake of clerical sexual abuse because the majority of those priests who have sexually abused minors have targeted young males, which in the papacy’s lexicon is synonymous with homosexuality. In consequence, the papacy is purportedly now in the process of taking steps towards curbing the intake of homosexual seminarians (Thavis 2002) (Kaiser 2002, p. 9).

Yet, any closure to this long-established source of priests in the current situation in which there are already shortages of priests is likely to aggravate rather than alleviate problems facing the priesthood. Fr. Stephen, for example, alludes to one social consequence that has stereotypical undertones: *All the churches would be up the creek if they got rid of the gays and lesbians: It seems that many homosexual persons have special gifts for professions such as the pastorate.* Homosexual priests have been represented for centuries amongst clerics – they have effectively proclaimed the Gospel, presided over local communities and provided pastoral care. Introducing prohibitions against homosexual seminarians may not only reduce one source of

¹¹⁸ This comment also has ramifications for the gender imbalance in the priesthood.

vocations, it may interrupt an unacknowledged social contribution that could lead to unforeseen consequences.

One prediction is that it could, “return seminaries to an unhealthy psychological environment, one that promotes secrecy, duplicity, repression and homophobic attitudes and behaviours intended to prove (to others and to oneself) that one is heterosexual” (Fuller 2002, p. 9). This situation could be further aggravated if homosexual cardinals, bishops and priests were made scapegoats in either formal or informal ways as implied in an interview with the Pope’s spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls who stated that, “there was no room in the Church for homosexual priests. He wondered whether the ordination of a homosexual priest was even valid” (Kaiser 2002, p. 9).¹¹⁹ Such threats could produce witch-hunts that would further destabilise the priesthood, a concern that one priest expressed: *I am nervous because of the fear that some priests have, that [it] will turn them into accusers to cover their own tracks* ('I am one of the Nervous ones' 1996, p. 11).

Another key consideration that the papacy needs to take into account is that Western societies are becoming ever more sensitive to discrimination against homosexual persons (Vacek 2002, p. 10). In these cultures, civil law has also been enacted to protect their human rights, which has brought the Church into potential conflict with the state and broader civil society. This movement has also forced some Christians in other denominations – especially those who have children, family members or friends who have declared their homosexuality - to rethink their reductive stereotypes. The result is that the hostility and prejudice that gay and lesbian people have had to bear in the past is rapidly diminishing. Consequently, any further discriminating practices on the part of the papacy may not only undermine the credibility of its teachings on sexuality, it may also have other unwelcome repercussions.

¹¹⁹ Cardinal Jorge Medina Estevez, who at the time was prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, has also stated ordaining such candidates to the priesthood would be imprudent and “very risky” ('Signs of the Times' 2002, p. 4). Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua noted that “a person who is homosexual-orientated is not a suitable candidate for the priesthood even if he had never committed any homosexual act” (Fuller 2002, p. 8).

Internal to the Church, the implementation of such a policy is also likely to increasingly polarise Catholics, which will encourage schismatic practices. Yet, there are reasons for the papacy's policies of sexual apartheid. The papacy resides at the apex of the hierarchical order, and if it is not able to maintain patriarchy, its belief system is likely to be undermined. Meanwhile, the secular media, gay activists and Christian reformers predominantly identify these particular priests not as celibate priests but as homosexual priests, which is anomalous to the hetero-dominant social order. The papacy is being forced to either jettison "the problem" or re-evaluate the presence of homosexual priests. Whatever action is taken, it is likely to incur substantial costs to the papacy's reputation, the availability of its priestly services, and the Church's coffers. Moreover, while celibacy remains as an overarching and over-simplified category, it is unlikely that the priesthood will be able to rid itself of the complex sexual entanglements it is now faced with.

The Contest of Women

The other negative stereotype used by the papacy and its local representatives is that which restricts women. In patriarchy, women are confined by an oversimplified standard that is perpetuated by the papacy and its local representatives by stressing the superiority of maleness over femaleness, celibacy over sexuality. According to Fr. Matthew, *a lot of [priests] would be very patriarchal. They're above women. They wouldn't see women as equals but as servants.* Fr. Matthew went on to say that there are certain women who *are very happy with the way things are in the Church. They have been the ones that have learnt to accept [patriarchy]. They've never known any different, and that's precisely why they do [accept].* Nonetheless, *[there are] some women who are beginning to think for themselves, ... questioning the Church, and pulling out of the Church. These women see the Church as old fashioned and stupid.* Increasing numbers of women are realizing that their position in the Church is ideologically restricted by patriarchal stereotypes.¹²⁰ In the Church, women principally attain social status in the Church by producing and socialising legitimate children with socially recognized fathers, which gives men a particularly dominant position (Haralambos 1990, p. 547). In hierarchical turn, priests act as

¹²⁰ The research project undertaken for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference reported: "The patriarchal system was identified as the greatest underlying barrier [to women's participation in the Church]" (Macdonald et al 1999, p. 80).

“Fathers” of fathers, bishops as *paterfamilias*, the pope as “Holy Father,” and God as “the Father.”

Patriarchy is further reflected in doctrinal texts in which the papacy assigns “human traits (as stereotypes) to male and female, for example, rationality, autonomy, strength and initiative vs. intuition, nurturing, receptiveness and compassion” (LaCugna 1992, p. 243). These latter traits, or stereotypes, are distinctly associated with motherhood. Dissenting women, however, regard this theology of complementarity¹²¹ as sexist and un-Christian. “This is not the preordained, intended order of creation but the order of fallen humankind, fallen creation” (LaCugna 1992, p. 243). Such women reject the idea that maleness is normative for speaking about God and mankind. Similarly, they reject “same-ness” for all women, because it marginalizes the diversity of women’s experience and limits alternative readings of their humanity.

Meanwhile, in the local churches, conservative priests pejoratively refer to women who contest such stereotypes as *feminists*, or in the case of religious sisters, *feral nuns*. These derogatory images ridicule and denounce women’s efforts to secure equal rights and opportunities to that of men, particularly of ordained men, that is, men made superior and separated from women by celibacy. However, the continual promotion of stereotypes is more likely to undermine the priesthood and Church, rather than uphold the *status quo*. Firstly, women are gradually becoming accustomed to the idea that they should not be discriminated against, either external or internal to the Church. Secondly, in the last three decades, Catholic feminist biblical scholarship and feminist theology have flourished, as have the numbers of women who have become theologically educated. These movements continue to promote the awareness of the historical and social subordination of women, and aim to correct the patriarchal biases of Scripture and its interpretations so that both women and men are liberated from androcentrism. Thirdly, “Many mothers no longer hold priesthood in esteem stemming from the fact that as women they have

¹²¹ LaCugna (1992, p. 243) defines the theology of complementarity as “man is the head of woman; man fully images God while woman images God by virtue of her relationship to man; woman is helpmate of man; woman has a special, pre-ordained divinely decreed place in creation, which is the sphere of home and family; she is equal to, though less than man.”

felt treated as second-class citizens in the church” (Malcom 1998, p. 9).¹²² Fourthly, mothers have traditionally been the primary catechists of their children, and if large numbers of women become critical of the papacy’s policies, their children will too. Thus, attempts by the papacy to promote patriarchy are increasingly likely to become frustrated as calls for change by women become more compelling and egalitarian ideals more attractive to many in the Church.

A Challenge to Locally Crafted Repetitions of Stereotypes

As the scandal of clerical sexual abuse has increased, the celibacy of priests has become the subject of even greater public scrutiny. This has pressured conservative priests to manipulate stereotypes used by the papacy at the local level to maintain an orthodox understanding of the priesthood. On occasion, at some formal gatherings, these priests use slurs and innuendo to attack individuals and groups with the aim of harming their reputations, thereby pressuring them to return to patriarchy. Having expressed their opinions, without fear of challenge, these priests can leave the confines of their confraternal gatherings, strengthened by assumed consensus and armed with critical comment that can be subsequently modified for public consumption. Yet, those priests whom I interviewed consider such rhetorical tactics as uncharitable and disgraceful. While these latter priests often assume the mantle of silence because they are unwilling to expose their own views and actions in such a hostile environment, a few are able to exercise dissent through alternative avenues.

The following is an analysis of one priest’s correspondence to me, written soon after a bishop was charged with sexual abuse of a minor. This letter is a reaction to comments made by his conservative confreres at a meeting of priests. Powerless to do anything about the offensive behaviour of these priests during that event, Fr. Peter chose another option to vent his concerns. His correspondence is a rhetoric of resistance that challenges locally crafted stereotypes. Fr. Peter begins his letter with an introduction to the priests at the meeting, over half of whom he considers *very conservative, very negative and quite emotional*. In his view, these priests are pessimistic in outlook, reluctant to accept change, and are very distressed that the

¹²² These women are reticent to promote the priesthood as a vocation for their sons because they are concerned “about mandatory celibacy, an all-male priesthood and worries about the loneliness of the lifestyle” (Malcom 1998, p. 9).

status quo is not being preserved in the Church. Fr. Peter goes on to report the views of his confreres: given that the accused bishop's credibility has been damaged by the allegation, the Church's *hope for salvation – faith and loyalty to the Pope and the Magisterium* – is in jeopardy.

For a conservative priest there is no salvation outside of the Church, and in the Church it is gained by dutifully submitting oneself to the directions of the papacy and its representatives. However, such an accusation against a bishop implies the possibility of a reversal in the divine order, an order in which these conservative confreres are situated. In reaction, these priests lash out at those who threaten their idea of Catholicism. These conservative priests are not primarily concerned with determining whether there is a case to answer; rather, they are concerned about the maintenance of their religious and moral credibility in an increasingly critical and indifferent society.

These priests refuse to believe that a bishop may have committed such an offence for it would mean a further unwelcome breach in the celibate priesthood, as well as the tarnishing of another stereotype, namely, that of "bishop": a position that a number of these priests may aspire to themselves. With self interests at stake, these priests look for scapegoats, which include the bishop's accuser and the media: *Now with this false accusation and trial by media he'll never be able to effectively perform the duties he was chosen for.* While such allegations can certainly damage a bishop or priest's reputation, regardless of whether he is innocent or not, no such consideration appears to be given to the alleged victim. Similarly, media programs that scrutinize the accusation and criticize the priesthood are described as *dangerous*. These priests also target for blame, particular individuals. For instance, they use a highly offensive term – *a real bitch* – to denigrate a high-profile Catholic female journalist. Particular bishops, priests and laypersons are also considered *dangerous ... and disloyal to the Church in suggesting that celibacy should be optional ... [they are] going against the Laws of the Church*. Catholics who criticize celibacy are accused of being disloyal and untrue to their commitments and duties to the Church.

Fr. Peter also reports that these conservative priests said *a lot about paedophilia, which the people (priests) who speak up in favour of celibacy do not understand.*

They [are] saying there is a link between paedophilia and homosexuality. As with the papacy, conservative priests stereotypically blur any same-sex activities and are not interested in any research that discriminates between these two states. This view broadly reflects the Catholic anti-homosexual view that has been deduced *a priori* from the Church's teaching that only heterosexuality can be affirmed (Fuller 2002, p. 9). Fr. Peter, however, holds a perspective that is similar to that of reform-minded Catholics and behavioural sciences, that is, that homosexuality is not a pathology. Conservative priests, however, principally concern themselves with the fact that *some [priests] have not been 100% celibate.* Yet, in the context of the gathering, Fr. Peter and other priests were very reluctant to challenge such vehement attacks: *No [priest] expressed a personal view or were game to speak of their own lives. It's a power-loyalty game. Another [priest] and I said very briefly that [celibacy is] not working but the opposition have totally closed minds and would not listen.* Fr. Peter and his confrere *judged it more prudent to keep the peace and avoid conflict* for fear of being negatively stereotyped and pushed out onto the margins of priestly life. In this hostile environment, with no available opportunities in the Church that allow them to speak of their concerns with impunity, and with few or no allies that would support them, these priests chose to remain silent.

Despite the closure of this avenue of protest, Fr. Peter still finds ways to actively resist stereotypes, although in ways that do not threaten his priesthood: *You just go ahead and do your own thing and say bugger the others, and try and do what is right and correct. I'm not going to talk with them, because you can't change them; you just go ahead, in your own way, do what you can and avoid doing what you can't do.* Fr. Peter uses pragmatic shrewdness and personal cunning to transform the priesthood. Not only does Fr. Peter use his correspondence to argue for change, he also finds other ways to forge the priesthood and the Church in ways he believes are appropriate. Moreover, Fr. Peter does not feel alone in his quest for reform: *I wouldn't lose any sleep over it. The Lord is going to provide. The Church is going to keep on going. There could be some surprising changes, some new directions in the Church.* For Fr. Peter, God has the ultimate power over what goes on in the priesthood and Church, not the papacy, not his bishop, not his conservative confreres. For this priest, unrealised possibilities lie beyond the horizon, which cannot be yet imagined in the present time.

A Joke about “Two Talking Parrots”

When I interviewed Fr. Luke as to whether celibacy was ever raised at formal gatherings of priests, he also indicated *it would be more a topic for a kind of a social situation. It is the sort of thing you joke about [because priests] don't generally share their thoughts and feelings about sexuality [and] certainly not about their own personal sexuality and what are their attitudes to it. If they do, its very “heady,” like what it would be out of moral theology books.* The papacy's prohibition on the public discussion of celibacy makes it difficult for priests to construct a shared language that describes their personal experience of celibacy and sexual intimacy. While moral theology does provide a language for an academic discussion, its intellectual approach is considered inadequate for understanding and exploring sexuality, inclusive of feelings and thoughts, difficulties and desires, sacrifices and expectations. Nevertheless, priests have developed a sexually coded language in the form of joking. This rhetoric of resistance is seemingly removed from the person of the priest but is inherently close to the desires and distresses of those who tell and respond to these humorous tales. *Raucous laughter* as Fr. Luke suggests, is a telltale sign of just how far the joke has reached into the intimate recesses of each priest, for such discharge releases the depths of celibate conflict, turning it into a moment of sexual comfort.

Fr. Luke wanted to assure me that these jokes had a level of respectability: *They wouldn't be smutty jokes, always respectful. We don't hear jokes that are openly sexual but often there are hints and double meanings and witticisms which will raise raucous laughter – jokes that go so far but not over the limit.* These jokes are subjectively interpreted according to what is perceived to be the accepted standards of decency within the cultural intimacy of priesthood: *I would never offend anyone with a joke; at least, I would be very sorry if I did.* However, what might be considered an appropriate joke for one priest may not be considered an appropriate joke for another. According to Fr. Luke, joking serves as a *very subtle ... gauge as to what others think ... about celibacy and sexuality.* If priests do not respond with laughter, *then you know you are in the company of [priests] who are not at ease with their own sexuality.* Some priests find it difficult to refer to celibacy and sexual intimacy in this light-hearted manner. These priests may also be aware that there is

inherent resistance in these word plays and their subtle opposition may signal disobedience on the part of the priestly jokester. But the phrase, “its only a joke,” serves these latter priests well if the joke is not appreciated. After all, he is merely trying to be amusing, rather than serious or in earnest. Such a strategy quickly restores the façade of a celibate priesthood, but failure in gauging an audience is seemingly uncommon because as Fr. Luke said, *you generally know your audience.*

The following is one example of such a joke that has *been around for a while; an old yarn* that was familiar to a number of priests I interviewed,

A lady goes to her priest one day and tells him, “Father, I have a problem. I have two female parrots, but they only know how to say one thing.”

“What do they say?” the priest inquired.

They say, “Hi, we’re hookers! Do you want to have fun?”

“That’s obscene!” the priest exclaimed, then he thought for a moment. “You know,” he said, “I may have a solution to your problem. I have two male talking parrots, which I have taught to pray and read the Bible. Bring your two parrots over to my house, and we’ll put them in the cage with Francis and Job. My parrots can teach your parrots to praise and worship, and your parrots are sure to stop saying ... that phrase ... in no time.”

“Thank you,” the woman responded, “this may very well be the solution.”

The next day, she brought her female parrots to the priest’s house. As he ushered her in, she saw that his two male parrots were inside their cage holding rosary beads and praying. Impressed, she walked over and placed her parrots in with them.

After a few minutes, the female parrots cried out in unison: “Hi, we’re hookers, Do you want to have some fun?”

There was stunned silence. Shocked, one male parrot looked over at the other male parrot and exclaimed, “Put the beads away, Frank. Our prayers have been answered.”

Priests take traditional stereotypes and re-craft them into obscure symbols that represent their personal concerns about celibacy and sexual intimacy. In this joke, two female stereotypes are presented. The first image is that of a socially acceptable

female character, namely, “a lady” who respectably veils her sexuality so as not to titillate “the priest,” a metaphor for the papacy. The “lady” then proceeds to present “the priest” with “a problem” about the existence of sexuality, which is embodied in the form of “two female parrots.” These colourful birds symbolize the second female stereotype: women who are not the least bit concerned with “the priest’s” body-spirit dualism. They desire sexual pleasure, aptly described as “fun.” “The priest,” however, considers that the remedy for the wantonness of these “female parrots” is to “cage” them with his “two talking parrots.” The “cage” symbolises the celibate enclosure in which priests live, whilst the “talking parrots” refer to sermonizing priests: note too, that there is no mention of the “two female parrots” being caged. The names of these “two talking parrots,” Francis and Job, likewise, serve as nostalgic synonyms for celibacy and piety. The first parrot is suitably named after a well-known Catholic saint, Frances of Assisi, who reportedly gave up a licentious life-style for ascetism. Job, on the other hand, was a righteous biblical character who withstood severe testing. These parrots are clearly made to represent the lives of those priests who share in this joke; they are confined by their “cage” of celibacy, forcibly separated by the papacy from those who might provide them with opportunities for sexual pleasure.

“The next day” - this extension of time implies a possibility in the future - “the woman” brings her “female parrots” to “the priest’s house,” a metaphor for the Vatican. “The lady” is also now referred to as “the woman,” a subtle erotic tease that increases sexual tension within the company of those who share in this joke. While the “male parrots” saying the rosary impresses “the woman,” it is she, not “the priest,” who puts her “female parrots” into the cage with “Francis and Job.” Since priests do not wish to leave the priesthood, it is women (or men, dependent on sexual orientation) that must come to the priests - not the other way around. Thus, the two male parrots are so amazed at their turn of fortune they are rendered speechless, an acknowledgement by priests that it would indeed be a miracle if the papacy were to remove their obligation to celibacy. Nonetheless, in the prayerful pleas of the “two parrots”, symbolized by the saying of the rosary, all things are considered possible. In a brief moment, priests are able to relish the suspension of celibacy and to indulge in sexual pleasure. More importantly, they have rhetorically triumphed in their

resistance to the papacy's prohibition on the discussion of celibacy whilst preserving their priesthood.

An Overview of Culturally Intimate Resistances

Despite incredible religious and social pressures to conform, a priest with friend imagines and creates covert rhetorical resistances that result in small and piecemeal challenges. By working incrementally, each of these priests erodes the power of stereotypes that uphold celibacy. Individual forays, however, must remain hidden or disguised because the papacy not only prohibits open resistance; it also prevents these priests from gathering and becoming organized in their challenge to celibacy. Such isolation thereby limits the strategies that priests with friends can use to negotiate celibacy, because a priest who feels alone in his attempts at reform is not likely to expose himself unnecessarily. Furthermore, without allies, a priest has no network of support or access to a larger and combined pool of resources that can assist him in his reformist goals. Consequently, by demanding silence and by keeping priests separate from each other, the papacy is able to sustain celibacy and therefore, preserve its authority and power.

When I queried Fr. Mark as to what he thought might happen if hundreds of individuals like himself were able to publicly speak out about celibacy, he replied, *It would start binding people together, you would find communities starting to share.* In the event of open dialogue, Catholics may come to realize that the stereotypical practices of the papacy are suspect and prejudicial because, firstly, they discount the value of these relationships in a priest's life and ministry. Secondly, stereotypes are essentially forms of discrimination that potentially overlook and discard a particular individual's talents, skills and knowledge that could be otherwise put to good use. In effect, stereotypes minimise the wealth of goodwill and service within the priesthood and Church, and beyond its boundaries. Meanwhile, an imposed silence, secrecy, and confraternal separation nurtures prejudice, ignorance and fear.

During my research, I came to the realization that a small number of heterosexual priest respondents are homophobic. While they may have experienced a watershed with regard to celibacy, these priests have not spared a thought for their homosexual confreres who also have difficulties with celibacy, as well as having to grapple with

the papacy's view that they are "objectively disordered." Consequently, if in some future event where celibacy is formally and publicly discussed, there is a danger that such homophobia could maintain the mischievous power of sexual stereotyping. Fr. Ben elaborates the potential of this problem: *Stereotypes create antagonism. You can't have dialogue – you can't get anything done – if people don't respect each other.* Without love and latitude in dialogic practices, such residual typecasting could curtail broad reform of sexual policies in the priesthood and Church and inhibit advancement in understanding sexuality. Similarly, one or two priests held reservations about women having any place in the Church other than that which they are already assigned. Nevertheless, and as has been evidenced, members in these stereotyped groups are challenging the minimizing strategies of patriarchy. Therefore, until each individual and categorical group listens to discover, rather than listens to control, it is unlikely that the priesthood or the Church will achieve a future sense of homogeneity.

Moreover, despite stereotypical practices, priests with friends are not likely to be deterred in their pursuit of reform because as Fr. Jacob comments: *I'm pretty keen on both [priesthood and friendship].* Meanwhile, Fr. Mark considers that *the average age of priests would be in a lot of the dioceses [about] 65 [and] that has a lot to do with it.* Fr. Mark holds the view that priests' age and the circumstances of their priesthood cemented their conservative views on celibacy and that younger priests would *have a completely different attitude to celibacy and sexuality.* But the irony of this claim is that Fr. Mark is in the same age bracket as those whom he accuses of being conservative. When confronted with this contradiction he responded, *[that's] because I've developed [my attitude] over the years and I refuse to give it up. Refusing to give it up* is a sentiment that is echoed in the responses of priests in this research. Despite the absolutist stance on celibacy held by the papacy and local conservative priests, change is already under way as priests with friends continue to redefine themselves through their inventive strategies.

Conclusion

This chapter concentrates on the relationship between iconicities and stereotypes in society, and how these images are rhetorically constructed, formalised, made socially operative, and resisted. Iconicities serve as the origins of stereotypes when those

images are formalized by a dominant group and then accepted by the masses in broader society. In this process of hegemony, iconicities have their eventual outcome in the social expression of oversimplified standardized images, which force individuals and groups to live in homogenized, social categories. These categories are made socially cohesive in an overarching social and familial pattern that situates each individual and group in predetermined positions in society. In consequence, priests with friends, homosexual persons, and women are not only limited to their respective stereotyped position in society; these social categories are constituent of a larger set of stereotypes, which in the Church takes the form of patriarchy.

Subalterns who experience the limits of these homogenised social categories recognize the imposition of stereotypic inferiority and consequently, they use rhetoric to resist fixed conceptions that makes their lives difficult. In identifying social and familial contradictions, priests with friends, homosexual persons and women, seek to challenge the uniform policies of the papacy, which is essentialized in categories of celibacy and marriage, and socially cohered by patriarchy. These individuals and groups idiomatically contest their stereotypical assignment through a variety of ways; firstly, by criticising the behaviour of those who use stereotypes to rhetorically control their membership. The benchmarks of behaviour from which these criticisms are drawn are values that are essentialized in a particular culture, which in the case of the priesthood and Church includes charity towards others. Consequently, subordinated individuals and groups are able to assume the moral high ground; thereby claiming their arguments have veracity. Secondly, arguments are given to emphasise the limits and negative consequences of stereotypes, which is again aimed at highlighting the contradictions of the values that are reified in a culture; a rhetoric that serves to challenge the social and familial pattern. Thirdly, individuals and groups use joking to manipulate stereotypes to their own advantage, even if that advantage can only be momentarily sustained.

Nevertheless, efforts to overcome stereotypes can only be small and piecemeal because the dominant social group prevents subalterns from organizing themselves publicly to contest these stereotypical images. But, in having recognized the limitations of stereotypes, these subalterns are no longer comfortable with the social and familial forms that are used to confine them to a particular social position.

Consequently, an ideological struggle is pitched between themselves and the dominant social group; a struggle that inevitably continues until the disjunctions that stereotypes create are reconciled. Chapter eight explores how priests with friends are attempting to resolve this impasse through a rhetoric of radical change by incorporating their friendships into their ordinary everyday priest practices, including those that are public.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Typical Priests and Their Ordinary Friendships

In the Church, priests are deemed co-workers with their bishop and are required to exercise collegial responsibility in ministry. Nevertheless, this egalitarian responsibility is constrained by official demands that oblige priests to be obedient to the papacy. Such compliance can produce significant dilemmas for priests, particularly for those with friends who no longer consider celibacy beneficial to their personhood and priesthood. Consequently, these priests invoke an egalitarian reading of collegiality in which they use their share of power to make choices about their friendships that they strategically negotiate within their lives and ministry.

In this chapter, I show how historical and social developments have influenced the respective rhetorics of priests with friends and the papacy. Priests with friends draw their rhetoric of resistance primarily from a modern worldview and humanist interpretations of the Second Vatican Council in which they argue their egalitarian views of celibacy and sexual intimacy. The papacy, however, draws its rhetoric of control from a classical worldview and a conservative reading of the Council in which it contends celibacy is essential for maintaining social order. This polarization is subsequently explored through an emphasis on a particular disjunction, namely, the social contest between ontology and authenticity.

I then demonstrate how priests with friends, in recognizing that the world and some parts of the Church are not fundamentally adverse to their struggle for authenticity, are making their rhetoric more proactive; indeed, these priests are cautiously shifting from a rhetoric of resistance to a rhetoric of radical change in which they merge popular notions of the “typical priest” with the “ordinariness” of friendship, a social fusion that they express in public. Such a strategy illustrates one way in which marginalized individuals and groups are able to normalize their ideas and relationships in a relatively hostile environment and despite an unfriendly bureaucracy. In consequence, through local level performances, priests with friends incrementally effect change. Even so, there are limits to the inventions of these priests, for the papacy upholds its rhetoric of celibacy with sanctions that can imperil

the lives, ministries and friendships of unskilled priests. Thus, a dominant social group has powerful advantages that the relatively less-empowered subalterns must negotiate with considerable craftsmanship and patience if they wish to eventually achieve social inclusion.

Sources of Dissent and Intransigence

Priests are located in broader histories and cultures that directly impact on their understanding of celibacy; indeed, this research would have a different tenor if it were played out in another era or other cultures such as Africa or Asia. Consequently, this section briefly analyses the changing historical and social conditions that have shaped and advantaged the rhetoric of priests with friends in the Western world. As indicated briefly in chapter four, during the Renaissance, particular European scholars and artists pressed for a reconsideration of the importance of the individual. These humanists asserted that society should exist for a human being's benefit: consequently, an individual should not be constrained by the interventions of political authorities or made subordinate to collective interests.

Such a view seriously challenged the temporal and divine authority of the papacies of the era. Moreover, the philosopher, Descartes (1596-1650), rejected the ontological position of the Church, which asserted that existing things belong to different categories that are ordered in a hierarchy. Descartes considered that the construction of reality lay within the individual and, therefore, he or she has instrumental control over objectified experience. From this new constellation of the self, Locke (1632-1704) was able to argue that an individual could remake him or herself by methodical and disciplined action. It is here that the modern notion of freedom manifested itself. The predetermined natural order, as expressed in Catholic cosmology and manifested in celibacy, was rejected by humanists and replaced by practical benevolence that "has become one of the central beliefs of modern Western culture" (Taylor 1989, p. 85).¹²³

¹²³ Taylor (1989, p. 85) goes on to say: "we all should work to improve the human condition, relieve suffering, overcome poverty, increase prosperity, augment human welfare. We should strive to leave the world a more prosperous place than we found it."

The objectification of experience was, nevertheless, considered limited by the Romantics of the late eighteenth century, who asserted the validity of subjective experience. The Romantics believed that each individual is understood to be different and original (Taylor 1989, p. 375). This originality, embedded in the depths of self, marks and defines the individual, which determines how a person ought to live. Consequently, the modern identity is now located in an orientation to inwardness and engaged self-remaking, a worldview that has been further supported by democracy, and *vice versa*. In this political environment, notions of freedom and equality encourage self-exploration and self-awareness that ideally result in the discovery of the original self. This search, according to Taylor (1991), rests on a moral foundation of authenticity, which he defines:

Briefly, we can say that authenticity (A) involves (i) creation and construction as well as discovery, (ii) originality, and frequently (iii) opposition to the rules of society and even potentially to what we recognize as morality. But it is also true ... that if (B) requires (i) openness to horizons of significance (for otherwise the creation loses the background that can save it from insignificance) and (ii) a self-definition in dialogue (p. 66).

From this perspective, sexuality is not just a variation within the same basic human nature, but is expressed through a person's original self. A priest is morally obliged in all aspects of his life, including his sexuality, to pursue authenticity. As a result, the papacy's claims of uniform practice and celibacy as being ontological to the priesthood are disavowed.¹²⁴ Celibacy can now only be considered legitimate for a priest if he considers it his own authentic sexual state. Furthermore, in order to pursue this image of humanity, a priest is required to dialogue with others to aid self-definition. However, this aspect of authenticity is made problematic in the Church because the papacy cannot accommodate originality in its belief system, for its maintenance depends upon unquestioned obedience to the prescribed hierarchical order.

¹²⁴While the current papacy promulgates celibacy as a discipline and would likely protest claims that its practice is ontological to the priesthood, its insistent propaganda and refusal to allow discussion on the matter amounts to a virtual acknowledgement that this is the case. This is evidenced both in word and deed: in word, the papacy frequently refers to celibacy when promulgating its theology of priesthood, claiming that it is a divine gift; in deed, it allows for no other sexual practice within the priesthood.

This cosmological shift eventually forced the Church to consider the challenge that these social developments presented. After a period of gestation, and at the Second Vatican Council, the papacies of John XXIII and Paul VI accommodated a modicum of egalitarian and democratic ideas. These papacies positively endorsed democracy for the administration of the state. Within the Church, they also promoted democratic notions, including: “collegiality, freedom of conscience, the recognition of churches with more synodal structures, and an emphasis on human rights” (Collins 1997, p. 192). This change of worldview has also been reflected, as mentioned in chapter three, in the re-evaluation of the status of marriage, which is now interpreted by some Catholics to be equivalent to the celibate vocation. Nevertheless, conservative anchors weighted these novel inroads, for the social order of the Church remains hierarchical and the prominence of the priest, including celibacy, continues to be emphasised.

Meanwhile, the current papacy promotes a classical worldview that is predominantly secured in an ontology in which people are constituted by the opposing characteristics of body and spirit, which are respectively represented by sexual intimacy and celibacy. This view is located in the Church’s Jewish heritage and Graeco-Roman culture. In the Jewish spiritual and ethical system, all Jews in cultic service temporarily practised celibacy because they believed that any bodily discharges, including semen, made them unclean: a state they considered incompatible with the holiness of God (Murphy-O’Connor 1990, p. 68). Greek philosophers, however, believed that the world was fundamentally a *kosmos*, an ordered world formed and guided by divine reason (Luce 1992, p. 135). Plato (428-348 B.C.) postulated that reality was situated in a divine world of eternal, non-changing and incorruptible Ideas, while the created world was a reflection of the higher world, but its sensible and corruptible objects participated in these Ideas only in an imperfect way. This cosmological construction placed an onus on every person to strive for likeness to the divine through education, formation and life in a well-ordered society. Sexual desire in this classical worldview was considered a diseased aspect of the personality, distracting the well-balanced person from intellectual pursuits.

These influences made an impact upon early Christianity and were expressed in Stoicism and Gnosticism,¹²⁵ which respectively promoted austerity and pessimism about all that was material. This preference for the divine was further developed by the Church Fathers, particularly Augustine, who presented a classical worldview through an adaptation of Plato's Ideas. According to Augustine, God was the source of Ideas, these being realised in the eternal and immutable cosmic order. Mankind, as participant in God's Ideas, was called to know and respect this divine order. Through attending to the inner self, a person made the step on the way 'upward' to God, and implicit in this notion of hierarchy was the body-spirit dualism (Taylor 1989, p. 220). Hence, many of the Church Fathers insisted upon celibacy.¹²⁶

This ontological dualism was made structurally concrete in the Middle Ages when celibacy was canonically used to bring about the centralization of the Church, as mentioned in chapter five. Subsequent papacies have essentially upheld this classical worldview including the papacy of the present day. Consequently, individualism and relativism, precipitated by the Enlightenment and challenging hierarchical intervention and static standards, are rejected and considered immoral. Indeed, the "emotivist" nature of modern moral thought that attempts to relegate moral discussion to a personal matter is regarded as the nadir of the contemporary world (MacIntyre 1984). In the classical worldview of the papacy, celibacy is considered a virtue that maintains social cohesion and continuity of the Church.

Nevertheless, the existence of these two worldviews within the Church has produced polarisation, confusion and tension. According to Collins (1997, p. 99), these two worldviews are *mutually exclusive, mutually corrosive, and simply incompatible: an absolute monarchy cannot be superimposed on a more democratic-synodal structure*. The current papacy has also recognized a conflict of interest in these different official positions. Subsequently, it has promulgated teachings that re-assert notions of social stratification and hierarchy over and above those of egalitarianism and democracy: collegiality is curtailed by the papacy, freedom of conscience is being challenged,

¹²⁵ Gnosticism was a religious sect that taught salvation comes by learning esoteric spiritual truths that free humanity from the material world, believed in this movement to be evil.

¹²⁶ The major writers of this period such as Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, wrote with remarkable unanimity about the higher state of celibacy.

synods reflect the papal line, and human rights within the Church are ignored.¹²⁷ In consequence, the papacy is able to restore formally its classical worldview, which is facilitated by the total identity of the priest, inclusive of celibacy, thereby keeping priests officially superior and separate to the laity. Nonetheless, behind the façade of the priesthood, there exists an ideological struggle over which worldview is appropriate for the priesthood and Church, a contest that is explored in the following sections of this chapter.

The Pursuit of Sexual Egalitarianism

While the papacy elects to perpetuate its own interests in the priesthood by insisting on a total identity for the priest, priests with friends resist this classical worldview by subtly promoting a modified modern worldview, composed of heterogeneous identities. After all, these priests, who having been born into, raised in, and continue to participate in both hierarchical and democratic societies, are well versed in both sets of principles, as well as being civilly advantaged by egalitarian ideals that acknowledge and promote sexual pluralism.¹²⁸ Consequently, such priests are able to knowledgeably adapt these abstractions to their own situation in order to promote their authentic sexual identity and friendships.

Fr. John, for instance, struggled over his homosexuality and need for sexual intimacy for years. Eventually, however, *[I came] through that moral crisis and ... I think God loves me and God accepts me as who I am, and [my] need to give expression to who I am periodically.* In overcoming the disjunction between the papacy's requirement and his authentic self, Fr. John is able to accept his homosexual orientation and acknowledge the need for expression of his unique sexual identity. Fr. David expressed similar efforts to overcome difficulties relating to his homosexuality and celibacy, and now tries

¹²⁷ In the case of priests who desire to marry, or have married, Church authorities are in contempt of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Rice (1991, p. 87) states "Article 10, is violated, in that *due process* is denied to any priest in confrontation with Church authorities. Article 16 stating the *right to marry*, is violated in the treatment of priests who attempt to marry.... Article 21 is violated in that priests have no say whatsoever in Church *government*." Article 22 is violated by depriving priests and nuns who leave of all *social security*. Article 23 is violated, in that priests have no *protection against unemployment* and are allowed no unions to protect them; neither priests' senates nor priests' associations are permitted to perform such functions."

¹²⁸ Notably, priests' experience of the democratic order is in stark contrast to the hierarchical order with which most administrators of the papacy who reside in the Vatican are familiar.

... to cultivate 'a taste for humiliations' – one of the Benedictine strategies for becoming a healthy, user friendly human being – i.e., getting out from under the power of the super-ego and becoming yourself (in modern jargon), or becoming a saint (in old-time talk) Whatever, it all comes down to the same – to keep on keeping on, being warm and open and loving and forgiving all [at] the same time as being straight and honest in the kindest and gentlest way possible ... i.e., growing up into real human maturity.

Fr. David effectively syncretises features of a former classical worldview with aspects of a modern worldview. In doing so, he is now sure of who he considers himself to be, relaxed and open about his homosexual orientation, and forgiving of those who persecute him.

Fr. Joseph also felt the need to work out his authentic sexual state, and he did so by plumbing the depths of his subjective experience. For a number of years, Fr. Joseph had enjoyed a friendship with Sr. Elizabeth: *They were the days of being 'madly in love' – days of the full-blooded affair. For me, the days of 'catching-up' of adolescence, for Elizabeth, I filled up a huge need for love and acceptance and assuaged her need to be affirmed.* Later, Sr. Elizabeth began to delve into her history of sexual abuse and their relationship began to change. About this time, Fr. Joseph too went to therapy and began to unpack some of [his] agenda; *this gave a renewed vigour to [their] friendship and [they] were able to communicate on a new level.* Fr. Joseph and Sr. Elizabeth then began to practise sexual abstinence for lengthy periods, but would occasionally *sleep together.* *The expression of our friendship was now different to the previous adolescent style. Nor did it concern us overly, that we would cross the boundaries.* The papacy's prescription of a total identity was insufficient for both Fr. Joseph and Sr. Elizabeth, and both felt the need to locate an authentic understanding of their sexuality in the context of their loving relationship and religious circumstances. Consequently, each of these two individuals attended psychotherapy, a process that helped them to make autonomous decisions about their sexuality without the external interference of the papacy. Fr. Joseph and Sr. Elizabeth consider that it is their right to engage in such self-determination, an egalitarian view that is also expressed by a number of other priests with friends. Quite clearly, these priests have replaced the papacy's uniform prescriptions which are essentialized in a classical worldview, with humanist

concerns which prioritise an individual's welfare that is achieved in the determination of authenticity.

Other priests also assert a humanist position from a political perspective. Fr. Joseph contends that, *any change in the discipline of celibacy ... will come "from below" not "from above."* Fr. Joseph believes that the body politic, not the "headship" of the papacy, will determine the future of the Church.¹²⁹ Furthermore,

*the scandal of clergy sex-abuse ... will effect change and is **already** impacting upon the Church structures, as in the current vocations crisis [original emphasis]. Attrition of the clergy will bring a new dawn for the Church and renew the Church's structures "from below" – as lay people naturally assume more responsibility for their local communities.*

According to Fr. Joseph, local Catholics at the grass roots will predominantly shape the Church, as opposed to the papacy, and they will do so by taking charge of their communities. Fr. Joseph concludes, *since most Catholics are married or will be married; or do not opt for celibacy as a way of life – a new form of "priestly ministry" will gradually take the place of the current practice.* In this priest's view, not only will the divide between the priest and laity weaken, so will other characteristics of separation deteriorate, such as celibacy. Fr. Simon also asserts this egalitarian notion in his opinion: *The principles of local self-determination and subsidiarity,¹³⁰ to which Vatican II itself pointed, must be once again honoured. With radical decentralisation, the universal requirement for celibacy will disappear.* In Fr. Simon's estimation, local Catholics, priest and lay alike, should have a say in the leadership and decision-making of the Church which, he argues, will have a radical impact on celibacy.

¹²⁹ Theologically, the body politic can be understood as the "People of God," a phrase take from the Hebrew Testament and used in the Second Vatican Council document, "The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church." This phrase embraces both priests and laity, and emphasises the communal nature of the Church rather than the hierarchical and institutional aspects (Craghan 1987, p. 755).

¹³⁰ Subsidiarity: A principle in Catholic social doctrine which holds that nothing should be done by a higher agency which can be done as well, or better, by a lower agency (McBrien 1994, p. 1252).

A Quest for Authenticity

Some priest respondents suggest there exist egalitarian tendencies and democratic undertones within the priesthood, which help them to establish their own authenticity within the context of their friendships. Fr. Luke, for example, enjoyed a friendship with Susannah that helped him *grow very much in [his] own person, in confidence and self-possession*. But the death of his brother, ill health, and *a roller-coaster ride of ministry, activities, work, administration, and people*, forced him to face questions about his life. Fr. Luke realised he *had a real problem in the deepest area of [his] inner self. It had all to do with the basics of my relationships with God, with others and myself. It was in the area of personal identity, the quality, direction and purpose of my life, personal happiness and well-being*. For Fr. Luke, this *moment of realisation was a great grace from God*.

Several months later, Fr. Luke embarked on a three-month course of personal renewal, designed for people in ministry in mid-life. During that time, he received one-to-one counselling and frequent spiritual direction, and was required by his spiritual director to constantly focus on two basic questions:

What did I want to do, as against needed to, or am expected to do with the rest of my life?

Who is/are the person/s, what are the situations, that energise me, give me life, make me grow as a person, and enjoy a peaceful heart before God?

For the first time in his life, Fr. Luke was given the opportunity to *listen to, own and begin to deal with these questions* about his own self. He could not be a celibate clone that requires him to sacrifice his sexuality and quality ministry; rather, he had to negotiate his own personal response to his particular situation within his priestly circumstances. Without establishing this inner point of reference, Fr. Luke felt he could not literally survive external expectations. Three years later, Fr. Luke left the priesthood and married Susannah. He has since adapted his ministry to the various circumstances in which he finds himself, and is actively involved in a reform movement initiated and promoted by married priests and their associates.

From a different perspective, Fr. Mark identifies within the postconciliar Church another aspect of egalitarianism: *When my colleagues and I joined the priesthood ...we felt we were being called to a greater state. Today, that kind of thinking would be considered an insult to the sacrament of marriage.* Fr. Timothy also expounds this view of equality through a recounting of his friendship with Judith: *[The] basis of the intimacy of our relationship [is] a life-long commitment to each other, through which we both believe that we [have] in fact contracted a marriage that [is] valid in the eyes of God, even though not recognized by the Laws of the Church.* Fr. Timothy persuasively argues that his “marriage” to Judith is an authentic relationship before God and further, contends that his marital contract has veracity within the context of priesthood.

*What this relationship has meant for me is a whole new understanding of the complex meaning of married love and the demands and restrictions it places on one. No longer [am] I able to think only of what **I** would do or how **I** would spend my holidays or what **I** would do with my money. Everything became **we** and **our** [original emphasis].*

After having fallen in love with Judith and making a commitment to her, Fr. Timothy no longer considers himself a single, separate or superior entity. Every aspect of his personal life shifted from the solo to the shared: Fr. Timothy now considers that his time, recreation, and finances are to be held in common with Judith.

Fr. Timothy also reasons that his friendship significantly changed his ministry,

I found that in my ministry I could talk with couples with a new awareness and could sympathise with their struggles. I could feel with them the challenge of good communication and the hurts of mistakes and insensitivity. I found a new strength in my pastoral work and the joy of knowing that at the end of a hard day there was someone with whom I could at least spend a few moments in conversation and a cup of tea shared together and then the moment for a hug and kiss before returning to my house.

I believe that it was above all, thanks to the support of Judith, that I weathered some very difficult times in my ministry, especially when I was alone for almost a year. After that there certainly could be no turning back on my commitment to her – she was part of my life and part of my priesthood. I believe she has helped me to become a far better priest – more

compassionate, more sensitive, more forgiving and a better communicator.

Fr. Timothy considers that his friendship with Judith has had a profound effect on his priesthood, a priesthood that he takes ownership of, rather than viewing it as a priestly extension of the papacy. In gaining an empathetic awareness for others through his marriage, this priest now claims he relates to his parishioners on a horizontal level, rather than in a vertical fashion. In Fr. Timothy's view, rank has been replaced with equity, and cult with community: as Fr. Timothy ministers to others, so too does Judith minister to him.

Furthermore, Judith is not secreted away in Fr. Timothy's private life, but rather his particular circumstances allow him to publicly combine his priesthood with her ministry,

Some of the most beautiful moments of our relationship have been the moments of shared ministry: preparing events together, going out on visitation together, sharing in weddings and funerals together. One of the most beautiful moments in our relationship was the moment we began to pray together. I really felt the presence of God in our relationship and I have been spurred on to maintain more than ever my personal prayer before God, conscious that we are walking on largely uncharted tracks, where no doubt many have been before us, but no one allowed them to share their story, because it is too threatening to the institution.

By walking the priestly tightrope between the contradictions of social stratification and egalitarianism, reflected further in hierarchy and notions of democracy, Fr. Timothy and Judith have made a space in parish life, which allows them to express an innovative practice within the priesthood. This couple as with other priests with friends, have and continue to find creative and imaginative solutions to resolve questions of personal and priestly authenticity. However, establishing these innovations in the Church is neither easy nor a foregone conclusion, for each priest must determine ways in which he can informally incorporate his friendship into his everyday life in ways that do not attract unwanted attention. The following two sections examine how particular priests who dare to play this syncretic game rhetorically negotiate the public limitations of their inventions. While the risks are

high, each priest with a friend must discover such strategies if he is to continue his ministry and retain his friendship.

The Politics of Ordinariness

In this study, rhetoric has been analysed to decipher the encoded interests of the priesthood, both from the perspectives of the papacy and priests with friends. The papacy and each of these latter priests endeavour to use their rhetoric in a manner that strategically promotes their self-interests, which is similar to iconicity in its effect. Just as iconicity seeks to background an awareness of resemblance, the rhetoric of the papacy seeks to erase its self-interests in celibacy so that it can represent its value as an unmediated truth. The papacy's contingent interests in celibacy can then be claimed as an eternal reality, which removes sexual intimacy from the domain of priests' social practice, whilst privileging the notion that celibacy is essential. Having established these truth claims, celibacy is effectively presented as an ordinary everyday practice for priests. Consequently, Catholics in general find nothing remarkable about priests being celibate. They consider the practice quite uninteresting and unimpressive, and certainly not worthy of comment. In turn, this customary acceptance hegemonically maintains the papacy's representation of celibacy as the existing state for priests.

Nevertheless, priests with friends can make use of the papacy's strategy of ordinariness to enhance their own lives and ministries. By using rhetoric in culturally intimate space, these priests can expand upon the idea of what is commonplace. The rhetoric used by these priests, however, is not necessarily verbal, for they can also persuade others that their friendships are socially acceptable through selective actions. This rhetoric of deed is much favoured by these priests because it aims to register their friendships as an ordinary everyday part of their lives. If a relationship is regarded as out of place or out of the ordinary, it would be dangerous for the priest and contrary to his purposes, for in effect, no attention is wanted. These priests therefore need not be necessarily dramatic or even particularly impressive in their efforts to promote their cause; on the contrary, the most effective performances are among the least palpable. Indeed, they avoid using language, whilst emphasising a rhetoric of deed, a strategy that helps them to avoid situations that require answers to questions about their friendships that they would prefer not to

give. Yet, these strategies have limitations, for ironically, ordinariness is attributed to the maintenance of the papacy's dominant rhetoric that demands priests live celibacy.

A Typical Priest and Ordinary Friendship

When a parishioner describes the local parish priest as typical, he or she implies that that particular priest conforms to the social expectation of what a priest is supposed be like. While ostensibly there is nothing particularly remarkable about him as to deserve comment, in fact, the typical priest demonstrates to his parishioners that he has mastered the rules of priesthood. For instance, such a priest ministers constantly to his flock but not to the point of utter exhaustion. He is charitable in his remarks and kindly in his actions; yet, as several priests opined, *[he does] not suffer fools gladly*. He is generous with his material goods, but not destitute. He is prayerful, generally more so than his parishioners, although not to the extent *that [he is] so occupied with the things of heaven that [he is] of no earthly good*. The typical priest negotiates a balance between what is expected of him and what he regards as proper for a priest. Essentially, he masters the rules, not they him. Consequently, a typical priest can successfully configure into his character a friend and when he does, he values his typicality, for being regarded as such helps him in his goal of having his friendship regarded as ordinary by others in the local Church.

Fr. Peter, for example, can easily be described as a typical priest. He is a parish priest of a large town and actively encourages his parishioners to grow in their faith and become involved in the parish. Fr. Peter has fostered such involvement by implementing various programs in his parish, including RCIA¹³¹ and visitation programs. He also has a reputation for respectfully listening to his parish councillors and usually takes into account their ideas when he makes decisions for the parish. Furthermore, Fr. Peter has been instrumental in refurbishing the church buildings, which were very much in need of repair. Generally, Fr. Peter is well regarded and liked by his parishioners. As a typical priest, he has essentially mastered the rules of how to publicly express his priesthood. Yet, this metaphor of “ordinariness” also

¹³¹ RCIA is an acronym for the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, which is a program offered to non-Catholics who wish to learn about the Catholic tradition of Christianity, and for those Catholics who wish to update their knowledge of the Christian faith.

suits him, because he has a friendship with Mary whom he met many years ago in a previous parish. When he was transferred to another parish, *[Fr. Peter and Mary] missed each other [although they] were able to meet often, which involved a lot of driving. Then [Fr. Peter] was appointed to another distant parish but [they] still managed to see each other about every three weeks.* After another three years, Fr. Peter was transferred to his present posting but this time Mary shifted house and was able to find employment in the same town as her friend. Having become skilled at negotiating celibate boundaries at a distance, Fr. Peter and Mary began to take control of the social rules to benefit their friendship and his ministry in closer proximity.

This new situation presented a more favourable set of conditions for Fr. Peter and Mary that enabled them to lessen the restraints imposed upon their friendship by celibacy. Over a period, Mary became quite active in the parish. Then when the live-out housekeeper resigned, she applied for the position and has been able to care and be close to Fr. Peter. By taking up accepted social roles in the parish, Mary, with the assistance of her priest friend, has been able to present herself as appropriate company for Fr. Peter: *I think the parishioners have accepted our friendship, and that took a long time to get to ... [Mary's] a real worker...and she has helped me do the things that have needed to be done here.* Fr. Peter and Mary established a public niche for themselves in the particular circumstances that have been presented to them and in effect, they have reconstructed ordinariness in the priesthood. While this presentation of typicality is not officially acknowledged it has, however, become fixed in the cultural conditions of this local parish. Nonetheless, the ordinary practices of Fr. Peter and Mary are contingent and are not free of threat:

Not many other people, including other priests would really understand the relationship. And some of them have sort of said "you don't need her around" and that sort of thing. And its been a real struggle of who does she belong to ... its so hard on the woman ... if there was marriage ... she would have acceptance, more or less, as someone.

Although Mary is active in the parish and keeps house for the local priest, her public position is tenuous and must be frequently defended by Fr. Peter. While Fr. Peter has a more egalitarian approach to relationships and ministry than his critics, he is

required to assert his priestly authority in the local context to protect his and Mary's friendship.

Priest respondents often encounter the problem of having to defend their friendships, and they negotiate this difficulty in instructively different ways. Fr. James indicates that he is much more circumspect about the public display of his friendship than is Fr. Peter: *only a couple of people know how close we are*. Other priests also indicate that they are very secretive about their friendships, including Fr. Tom who said, *[when we're in] public, and if [we] see anyone [we] know, [we] just peel off*. Fr. Tom and his friend automatically separate in a public situation if those who might recognize them see them with each other. Fr. Joshua also recounted a situation where he and his friend had been walking together late one night and encountered his bishop in the company of a *lady friend*. The bishop just looked ahead stony faced, and neither priest nor bishop acknowledged each other: *we were like ships passing in the night*.

For these priests and their friends in these contexts, they are unable to creatively transform the papacy's rhetoric of celibacy. In effect, they reduce their social repertoires to the range that is expected by the papacy in which priests publicly present themselves as single, removed from the ambiguous company of their particular friends. Fr. Ben, however, has been able to negotiate a degree of public exposure: *It was very, very bad the first couple of years and I think we were sort of getting through a lot of [our own] tensions*. Now he and his friend are comfortable with regularly dining at a restaurant once a week. This social pattern has recurred so often that it has become accepted in his parish. In effect, Fr. Ben has negotiated a strategy of ordinariness by promoting a habit. While priests with friends might, at first, be unable to negotiate creative strategies in public, they may, over time, develop a range of techniques and skills and recognize opportunities that they can use for various performances of ordinariness.

Local Performances for Local Circumstances

Priests with friends are required to create strategies of ordinariness in the context of their local situation, but each diocese, as demonstrated in chapter seven, has its peculiarities that must be taken into consideration. Fr. Philip, for example, finds it

very difficult to negotiate his friendship in public because conservative parishioners constantly police his public activities. Furthermore, his bishop, in the face of reports about clerical sexual abuse in the diocese, has warned all his priests that they *must not cause scandal*. Given the local and complex set of circumstances, Fr. Philip is thwarted in his attempts to negotiate his friendship in public and consequently, remains cautious about disclosure,

When you have a friendship like that you want in every situation to nourish the friendship, you don't want to do or say anything that would tarnish it, but I suppose in those times you would want to err on the side of being careful, in order to protect it.

Fr. Philip very much cherishes his friendship, but is concerned about the relatively hostile environment that forces him to be secretive about his relationship: *I think the present climate isn't very helpful ... it's like the image of priesthood has definitely been tarnished, and its against that background that people would probably view a relationship with some suspicion or anxiety.* In the current climate where the reputation of priests is being sullied by incidences of clerical sexual abuse, Fr. Philip considers that all relationships might be considered in some way to be suspect. Fr. Philip also went on to say, *you're guilty until you're proven guiltier*, which suggests that he always has at the back of his mind the consideration that Catholics will think the worst when he and his friend are together in public.

Fr. Jesse, another typical parish priest, indicates that having a friendship in a small or medium-sized town, or a country diocese, *is different than in the big cities, ... [where] there is much more liberty for the priest [because] he is not so well known [and] you could do all kinds of things.* In contrast, those priests stationed in country areas, like Fr. Jesse, are often well known. *There are probably thousands of people who know who I am, for example, every time I go to the shopping centre there are always people who say "Hello Father," and I haven't got a clue who some of them are, or they might have kids at school and I might recognize their face, but don't know their names.* In country areas, it is also more likely that both Catholics and non-Catholics know the local priest, although Fr. Jesse considers that non-Catholics who knew him did not pose a problem. Fr. Jesse found it relatively easy to confide

in these select few about his friendship: *They don't put me on a pedestal like most Catholics ... they don't have so many hang-ups about priests having friendships.*

In some respects, being known by a large number of Catholics does not deter Fr. Jesse either; it has just made him more shrewd and careful. Fr. Jesse has been able to negotiate his friendship with Joanna in public by taking advantage of changing circumstances within the Church.

Twenty years ago we never had [parish] secretaries [and] the priests did all the work, but now its got to the stage that, I've got two or three. [While] the shortage of priests has something to do with it, I think people realize the work of the Church is expanding and becoming more demanding, and with computers and modern technology, you've got to have a secretary.

As secretaries are commonly women and given that *there are more women keen to do the work in the Church*, these women have been able to insert themselves into positions in the Church that were not previously available to them. In return for their services, Fr. Jesse takes these women out to lunch or some other social event: *Some of the women in the Church, secretaries, women in the CWL,¹³² and others; I would go out with them and occasionally I would go out with others.* The acceptance of women working with priests in parishes is becoming so commonplace that when a priest is seen in public with a female parishioner, particularly one who has a role in the local parish or diocese, it is no longer considered unusual.

Fr. Jesse and Joanna take advantage of this ordinariness. Just as Fr. Jesse takes other women out for meals, he similarly takes his friend to restaurants or other selected social events. *The average person knows you are allowed to have friends, and the people would know I would have lots of friends, but I don't think anyone would see [Joanna] as that kind of friend.* Fr. Jesse slots his friendship into his established social pattern of typicality, enabling him to promote the idea that nothing is out of place. *The most significant thing [Joanna and I] would do now is that we would go out for meals together and you generally go out to different restaurants and places every time. Lots of places you go to you're not recognized. It's not a parish scene;*

¹³² CWL is an acronym for Catholic Women's League

it's a public scene. Fr. Jesse gives triple insurance to the public presentation of his friendship: not only is it commonly known that he takes out female parishioners to restaurants, he takes them to a variety of eating places, and he does so in a public place that does not accord his celibate status any special significance. However, while secular society does not generally concern itself with a couple being together, even in this situation Fr. Jesse maintains a degree of vigilance. *There are also certain things you don't do in public, [like] holding hands ... the only time we might hold hands ... it might be say, half past ten [at night], and then we might hold hands going over to the car.* Under the cover of darkness, Fr. Jesse effectively negotiates a public space in which he and Joanna can be openly affectionate.

To be an effective actor in the performance of ordinariness, a priest's friend must also be able to skilfully negotiate the social conventions of the priesthood. Fr. Jesse, for example, *publicly treats Joanna as I treat [my other parishioners]. You've got to make a special effort to make her like another parishioner. She realizes it too. [In public, Joanna] is very careful about the way she speaks to me, so she is very, very conscious of the unspoken rules.* These *unspoken rules* provide guidelines for a priest's friend as to how he or she must present him or herself in public, but each friend, as with each priest, must discover how these unspoken rules of friendship are to be applied in each particular circumstance. Fr. Daniel and Eve, for instance, privately discussed how they were to negotiate the situation that presents itself after he finishes saying Eucharist and the congregation has dispersed. Well rehearsed, they are now able to successfully deal with this specific event: *Every one wants to talk to me [after Eucharist], so I make sure she has the car keys and she just goes and sits in the car. She sees my priesthood as my profession and its like if I were a company director; she wouldn't necessarily want to be on the board.* In this situation, Fr. Daniel strategically separates his friendship from his priestly duty, which suits the expectations of his parishioners, while Eve plays her part by separating herself from his *profession*.

Fr. Adam and Hannah also comment on their negotiation of the unspoken rules of friendship in this situation. After Eucharist, these two keep their distance from each other, making themselves available to other parishioners, whom they often genuinely wish to seek out. If they do need to speak to each other on these occasions, Fr. Adam

expresses a modicum of familiarity and appropriate friendliness, while Hannah presents herself as a privileged and amiable parishioner rather than an intimate friend. In the case where they do need to confer about personal matters, Fr. Adam prioritizes priestly idioms over that which might be expected of a friend. For example, Fr. Adam says in this public environment, *I'll keep that appointment at 10 am.* Such priestly speak, however, is in contrast to what he might say in a personal situation, *I'll see you around 10.* Hannah recognizes why and the way in which he uses a shifter and responds appropriately. By learning to accommodate and negotiate Fr. Adam's different roles in different contexts, Hannah is able to protect their friendship by promoting it as ordinary.

Priests and their friends are consequently able to manipulate social distance to create occasions for presenting their friendships in public and for furthering strategies of ordinariness. By working quietly and on the margins of public expectations with the patience of the long haul, these priests create intersections in the celibate route of priesthood. At these crossroads, they attempt to resolve personal difficulties and reinvigorate priestly identities. In doing so, they create pathways on which the priesthood and Church can travel towards its future. This journey, however, is not just one for the local Church. It is also a trek for the universal Church, because larger and smaller entities are linked by a continuum, which is measured on a political and social scale. The more priests are able to promote their friendships as being ordinary, the more likely the social balance will tip towards their preferred option.

Some Dangers of Typical Practices

Sometimes strategies of ordinariness unravel. Fr. Adam and Fr. Zac, respectively, invited their friends to stay at their presbyteries. Each of these priests' friends had a particular reason for staying in their friends' home, which was considered legitimate by their priest-friends from a pastoral perspective. Fr. Adam's friend had business to attend in the town, and stayed two days. Fr. Zac's friend was temporarily homeless and stayed longer: *The main reason for [my friend] coming in, [was] when she was going through a lot of trouble and had nowhere else to stay, [so] she stayed for a week.* Both these priests generously welcomed their friends, as they do other guests, so that they could alleviate their need for temporary accommodation.

However, parishioners in their respective parishes, described by Fr. Zac as being *ultra-conservative*, criticized these priests for allowing these women to stay in the presbytery. Fr. Zac went onto report,

... they were warning me [because] ... one of our parish priests who is well known for his relationships with women...had women staying here at the presbytery. And the reason they warned me about [my friend], is that they didn't want [my friend] and me being talked about like this other priest.

These particular parishioners use a past scandal to pressure Fr. Zac to return to the perception of their celibate ideal, which isolates the priest and makes him appear separate and superior to other people. Furthermore, these parishioners contrast the idealised reputation of Fr. Zac with the demonised reputation of his friend whom they subordinate by their disapproval: *it is well known that [my friend] is divorced*. Conservative Catholics generally deem divorce, regardless of the reasons why these people have terminated their marriage, as sinful.¹³³ In the estimation of these parishioners, both women (the other priest's friend was also divorced) were unfit houseguests, so they took it upon themselves to communicate these judgements to their parish priests in the hope that they might sever their friendships. While neither of these priests paid personal heed to these stereotypical references, knowing the value and worth of their friends and because they loved them, they did re-negotiate how they would be seen in their company. Subsequently, the presbytery - the priest's home - became a place of taboo.¹³⁴

Christianity pays lip service to the belief that all people are created in the image of God and therefore are arguably equal in the sight of God. In practice, however, the Church as promoted and policed by the papacy and its representatives, does not condone egalitarian attitudes towards sexual organization within its midst. Priests

¹³³ In the case of this priest's friend, she had previously been a victim of domestic violence.

¹³⁴ What has been analysed here is the public negotiations of priests in heterosexual relationships as reported by their discourse, and which has been further enhanced by ethnographical observation. However, I did not receive enough detail from priest respondents who are homosexual, nor did I have sufficient opportunity to observe the social interactions of these priests and their friends to be able to analyse their public negotiations. During the course of this research, these priests have faced increased and unwanted attention, which I believe, has made these priests wary about disclosing their friendships either to myself, or in public.

with friends do attempt to rhetorically argue for a more egalitarian Church, but they are frustrated by the pressure and power of the papacy, which condemns and casts out all who it discovers do not fit the patriarchal mould. However, discovery is only one ending to a performance. Priests with friends continue to persist in their endeavours to adapt celibacy by constantly creating new inventions that they can use for their many and varied performances.

Preaching Practices

Priests with friends are also in a position to subtly promote change through their formal interactions with parishioners and others. Each priest determines how far he can go in pushing a reform agenda dependent on the local situation and his own preparedness to take risks. Fr. Joseph, for instance, is very diplomatic when it comes to dealing with controversial issues, but he still challenges the *status quo* in definite and conscious ways. In his diocese, there *are extremely conservative priests who are anti-Pill, anti-condoms and are quite capable of ... talking about people who break the Church's rules about birth control*¹³⁵ *from the pulpit. Some priests are very judgmental and negative; they're full of condemnation and judgment of people who don't keep the rules.* In contrast, Fr. Joseph refuses to talk about matters relating to sexuality from the pulpit, *because some others do. I deliberately don't mention some of those things, because I think there are some much more important principles that we avoid.*

Fr. Joseph, however, *talks a lot about forgiveness and acceptance*, and he does so in particular ways. *I try and stick to Gospel truths, and in the Gospel, Jesus says nothing at all about sex.* Fr. Joseph uses structural nostalgia to moderate the papacy's doctrine of sexuality, including celibacy for priests, by putting forward truth claims that are taken from the scriptures. For this priest, this original source is the principal moral authority, and its guiding principles are to be applied to all aspects of life in which sexuality is not singled out for special treatment. At the same time, Fr. Joseph is also implying that selective use of scriptural passages to uphold particular sexual teachings is often exegetically and morally flawed and should be

¹³⁵ The Church, as expressed by Pope Paul VI, "teaches that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life," and therefore prohibits the use of artificial contraception (McBrien 1994, p. 989).

jettisoned, as he does when he rejects this approach in the construction of his homilies. Nevertheless, Fr. Joseph has received criticism from conservative parishioners who consider that the content of his homilies is *too biblical*, and that he *should talk about the commandments of the Church, rather than what the bible says*. For these parishioners, doctrine and canon law are the principal sources of morality, which demands celibacy of priests.

Fr. David, on the other hand, does speak about sexuality from the pulpit. One day, I was sitting beside his friend Rebecca during Eucharist. While listening to his homily about the personal cost of following Jesus, I was struck by an anomaly that subtly acknowledged the authenticity of his friendship. According to Fr. David, Christianity makes great demands; *it's not something to be treated casually or lightly*. He then posed two questions: *Are you willing to pay the price to be a disciple – and do you think it is really worth it?* Fr. David then went on to say that *Christ gave us certain standards, certain values and we don't go through life without being tempted to set them aside, and human nature being what it is, we can find reasons to justify our action*. This was followed by examples of how people fail to uphold Christian values; including *maybe it's the casual sexual relationship that involves no commitment*. That is when I caught my breath. In the Church, the only sexual relationship that is officially permitted is in marriage. This priest, however, in not having that privilege, asserts that sexual relationships outside of marriage could be permissible if they involve commitment, as is the case between him and Rebecca.

Fr. David continued: *Nothing is free, and behaviour that dehumanises us, or spoils God's image in others or ourselves is really not worth the price we have to pay*. In his estimation, God's image in their friendship is not spoilt, nor does it dehumanise either of them in any way; the corollary being that the current rule does spoil God's image and is dehumanising. In Fr. David's estimation, his friendship with Rebecca upholds Gospel values and he is prepared to say so publicly: *some things are worth whatever they cost. That is the really important message of this Gospel Reading [Mt. 13:44-52]. Some things are worth whatever it takes to get them - strong character, integrity, a clear conscience, deep/committed friendships, health - what kind of prize tag would you put on that?*

Fr. Joseph and Fr. David, each in his own way, syncretise ancient and contemporary beliefs in order to negotiate the morality of their friendships in a given framework of beliefs and values. Fr. David, in particular, is an entrepreneur of new sexual relationships, as evidenced by his formal promotion of relational alternatives that aim to create gradual acceptance of sexual intimacy in committed relationships in the priesthood and elsewhere. Yet, from another perspective, this priest dares fate. Fr. David claims his right to be included in the priesthood through a skilful presentation in which he applies Christian principles to contemporary relationships; a morality that he not only preaches but also practises in his friendship. His rhetoric is based on the confident knowledge that when it comes to comparing degrees of priestliness, he holds his own with the best. Indeed, both these priests demonstrate priestly competence that goes beyond the reproduction of mere convention. This, in effect, is an expression of their authenticity within the priesthood.

An Enlarged Typicality

Fr. James holds a senior position in his diocese in which he has the reputation of being hard working and conscientious. He is also well known for his compassionate comments about the marginalized in society and consequently parishioners and others seek him out for spiritual care and pastoral guidance. Basically, Fr. James is a typical priest but his position in the hierarchy allows him to amplify this image to such an extent that it is emblematic of his standing in the diocese. This larger typicality also allows Fr. James to extend the public display of his friendship with Ruth.

Over the years, Fr. James and Ruth have established a culturally intimate network of support in which they enjoy the frequent companionship of their friends, which includes other priests and their friends. In the case of less closely related acquaintances, Fr. James is quite at ease when he introduces Ruth to others, and is comfortable in acknowledging the value of her presence in his life. For example, he often says, *Ruth says this or that, or I asked Ruth what she thought of it, and so on.* When I expressed my surprise about how many people knew about his friendship, he responded, *I've always been a fairly open person.* Fr. James later commented: *I'd say without blowing my trumpet that I do have the respect of people in my parish.*

I've got my critics of course; most of them ultra-conservative but their criticism doesn't worry me too much. The senior position of Fr. James in the diocese minimises the effects of conservative Catholic disapproval. On the other hand, his status gives him greater freedom to negotiate his friendship in public. Furthermore, each time Fr. James shares a knowledge of his friendship with others he tests the delicate sexual negotiations in the Church, and each time he succeeds in gaining their acceptance, he makes it easier for them to express affirmation for priests with friends.

Yet, Fr. James' social ease with his friendship has not come easily. For over a decade he wrestled with his priesthood and his love for Ruth but after numerous trials and tribulations, he concludes that their love for each other is authentic and graced. With God's favour, he now believes he can combine both priesthood and friendship: *faith gives us the courage to dare the impossible.* Furthermore, having achieved moral clarity and discerned supernatural support, Fr. James dares fate in particularly skilful ways. From a place of peace within himself, where an absence of inner questions lessens defences, Fr. James feels no need to rigidly define the social parameters of his friendship: *I'm not in your face with it. It's just that she's in my life and ... I am a part of her life, and that's it. It comes out really naturally.* Fr. James considers every aspect of his friendship is natural, and from this position of authenticity, he reflects an ease and comfort with Ruth in the company of others. While Fr. James' behaviour is not quite normative, it is sufficiently close to the norm to command acceptance and even love. And, he succeeds, I suggest, because his daring but subtle routines indicate that he is unafraid to rise above the official expectations and make real changes within the priesthood.

Fr. James is to some extent a charismatic figure who uses his charm and influence to inspire confidence in a new moral standard. Such charisma is a form of authority that emerges in times of crisis and is diametrically opposed to rational authority that finds its expression in bureaucracy (Gerth and Mills 1974, pp. 52-53). This is evidenced when Fr. James is sometimes given the opportunity to speak publicly about relationships in general, and on infrequent occasions, about sexuality and celibacy in particular. At these times, he stresses the value of relationships and how important they are to people's lives because *they bring fulfilment and happiness.*

This includes *relationships with God, with other people, with your family*. While Fr. James does not talk about specific relationships such as that which he has with Ruth, he is aware that this relationship is uppermost in his mind. He is also able to speak about *God's most beautiful gift of sexuality*. At the same time, he can give equal emphasis to his criticism of the papacy's policy: *celibacy should be looked at as part of the overall reform that the Catholic Church is in need of ...and I suggest that celibacy should be optional*. Fr. James' boldness is measured with rhetorical skill and a certain flair in his management of self, which he has honed over the years. Fr. James tempers his criticism with graciousness and considered intelligence, whilst being mildly prophetic.

Fr. James has imaginatively reconstructed the priesthood. In his strategies of ordinariness, he subtly invites parishioners, confreres and others to have a say in the workings of the Church. By favouring friends and acquaintances with a selective knowledge of his friendship, they are effectively being given opportunities to consider alternatives to celibacy, and significant numbers in Fr. James' parish are saying yes to that option. In practising and preaching a modicum of egalitarianism and in asserting adapted democratic notions, Fr. James is able to transform celibacy and sexual intimacy within the priesthood and Church.

Yet, this analysis not only explains the individual prowess of one priest, it simultaneously contributes to an account of cultural change at the level of collective representations, which is dynamic and not static as the papacy and *ultraconservatives* would have it. A priest who has a friendship will inevitably communicate these experiences in the social environment through a variety of rhetorical expressions, no matter how cloaked his representations. Such rhetoric will, in turn, be considered and re-expressed through collective representations that will impact on various individuals, and so the social process continues. This, however, is not simply a ricochet effect, but an effect that spirals from a relative point of meaning to another. Cultural change decreases or dependent on the situation perceived by either the individual priest or parishioner, which inevitably has an impact upon the priesthood and the Church.

Ongoing Negotiations

The papacy claims that the Church has always possessed a classical worldview and hierarchical government in which celibacy is a linchpin situated at the apex. Yet, the representations of priests with friends, as indicated by this account, show that the social ordering of the priesthood is charged by vigorous activity that produces development and change. Priests are intensely engaged in this building process through rhetoric, particularly of deed; they open, consider, discard, and expand the priestly system with alternative notions of celibacy and sexual intimacy. Thus, the priesthood and the Church cannot be said to have fixed celibate-sexual boundaries as demonstrated by entailment of these priests; rather, these boundaries are in constant flux, patterned by political contest and inequality. The papacy, on the other hand, has confined its abstract ruling of celibacy to a literal understanding of rhetoric, which leaves it unable to realize how priests with friends are able to deploy, deform, and transform the formalised canon of celibacy.

In different ethnographical settings, each priest with a friend uses typicality to produce different repertoires of celibate-sexual convention, which tests the possibilities and limitations of an encompassing iconicity of celibacy. Yet, these priests must be good at self-presentation, a skill that enables them to minimise the risks of social embarrassment and maximise the ambiguity of social interactions for the enhancement of their own personal and priestly goals. One incident reported to me, further highlighted the importance of being a skilled performer. Fr. Steve was aghast at his friend hanging out her washing, especially her lacy underwear, on the presbytery clothesline. *What will people think*, he exclaimed. Sarah responded with exasperation, *When will they grow up!* Fr. Steve replied, *But it's all about image*. Despite difficulties, this priest instinctively knows that he is required to keep up appearances through social performance. For the stereotype of the “typical priest” to exist, an embedded concept of normativity is presupposed, but this stereotype also furnishes negotiable models for the conduct of social relations. Fr. Steve endeavours to promote his friendship as being typical for a priest, but the display of Sarah’s lacy underwear challenges that image of ordinariness with its blatant show of femininity and sexuality.

Only from a position of hierarchical power, which rests on his ability to maintain typicality, is Fr. Steve able to make changes to celibacy in the priesthood. Imaginative representations are, therefore, used by priests with friends are required to fit within hierarchical contrasts. In a culture where the ideal-typical image of the celibate priest is contrasted with marriage, that contrast is itself a resource. Priests with friends can therefore subtly dramatize “celibacy” for their own contingent purposes. However, these priests and their friends must recognize the limits of their inventions and the traps for those who cannot back up their eccentricities. When support from parishioners and confreres is not forthcoming, these priests risk being shamed and ridiculed, and are often removed from their parish. However, as has been demonstrated, a performance of calm confidence can protect the most sexually intimate friendships and a notion of priesthood held by a priest with friend. These priests need to remain constantly aware that stretching the performance over too long a period or showing a poor grasp of its limits can be disastrous, as every sexual scandal indicates.

While the papacy totally defines what it means to be priestly, inclusive of celibacy, it also makes invisible the inequalities within the priesthood and Church. Yet, the priesthood does not rest on the existence of “self-evident truths” fixed in doctrine and canon law, but on the presentation of contingent circumstances as self-evident truths, as illustrated in this account by priests and their friends who transform the papacy’s “evidence” in local contexts. Thus, the papacy’s rhetoric of self-evidence contains the means of its own decomposition. Through ironic play on the priestly vocabulary of ordinariness – gestural as well as verbal – priests with friends can negotiate the culturalized sexual rules to reconstitute typicality in each situation as it arises. A “typical priest” is rarely so very typical; more often, his typicality consists in actively disobeying the laws of the priesthood. What is untypical for the encompassing priesthood becomes, instead, a positively valued prophetic activity – a typical untypicality – for priest respondents and others in the Church. This unites them in a new maverick iconicity. That this iconicity is clearly being established is evidenced by the representations used by priests such as Fr. Joel: *a married priesthood is just plain commonsense, and eventually women priests too*. The use of such rhetoric in which change to the canon of celibacy is being put forward as commonsense is a way of naturalizing the alternative, making resemblance disappear into the “obvious.”

The rhetoric of commonsense is consequently an exploration made by priests with friends who are trying to refashion their imagined iconicity. These priests are endeavouring to understand the sexual characteristics that define priesthood, which relocate their own lives in ministries in ways that are relevant, meaningful, and authentic. As a result, the ordinariness of celibacy, which has been socially embedded over time, is becoming increasingly subject to negotiation. Nonetheless, this is not free play; the transformation of celibate norms requires a skilled appreciation of what others consider the norms to be. Fr. Sam is particularly aware of this factor, for he frequently reads the Catholic barometer of opinion and makes use of his findings in his rhetorical strategies: *Daily I meet Catholics who despair for the Church they love and feel powerless to do anything about it. [What I say] may not be acceptable to everyone, [but] I trust ... [I] give heart and voice to many Catholics.* Through listening to Catholics, Fr. Sam infuses his collegial negotiations with a broad evaluation and careful consideration of reforms that he considers is needed to bring about a faithful and functional priesthood. This grass-roots perspective has significant ramifications for the papacy, for if it continues to ignore and suppress the prophecies of priests with friends, the priesthood and Church will continue to experience dissension and dissolution. At worse, it will not be able realize its own authenticity necessary for retaining political influence, public credibility and religious veracity.

Conclusion

This chapter concerns itself with the influence of historical and social developments on the rhetoric of priests with friends and the papacy, and how they use their respective arguments to further their purposes. Priests with friends having trained in the tradition of a classical worldview, have tended to shift to a modern worldview to accommodate heterogeneous identities, inclusive of their friendships and sexual orientation. Conversely, the papacy upholds a classical worldview in which celibacy is negotiated as a homogenizing practice. The papacy, however, is being confronted by a modern worldview both within secular society and through the humanist modifications made to its preferred cosmology at the Second Vatican Council.

This cosmological disjunction within the Church has been expressed through a dialectical tension between authenticity and ontology.¹³⁶ Authenticity gives preference to dialogical and internal knowledge of self in the context of ordinary life or immanence. In contrast, ontology emphasises a hierarchical and external knowledge of mankind in the context of extraordinary life or transcendence. Priests with friends tend to stress the advantage of interpersonal relationships from which notions of collegiality and egalitarianism are derived. The papacy, on the other hand, is inclined to focus upon the solitary priest who functions within a hierarchy that keeps him separate and superior, and therefore celibate. Hence, the papacy situates itself in the modern world and powerfully exercises its influence. Such a stance is upheld by a rhetoric of static beliefs, concrete moralities and uniform identities, a position that is directly related to an ontological stance. At the same time, the papacy refuses to interact and engage with the arguments and practices of a modern worldview that prioritises authenticity. Thus, subalterns that express diversity in social unity desire public and formal opportunities to present their case. A dominant group, however, prefers to maintain social cohesion through hierarchical uniformity and therefore denies opportunities to resolve disjunctions.

Meanwhile, priests with friends have discerned that some parts of the world and sections of the Church are not essentially against their ideological struggles. However, these priests, in having no access to formal and public forums, attempt to deal with their difficulties by resorting to a rhetoric of radical change. In this strategy, priests with friends merge popular notions of the “typical priest” with the “ordinariness” of friendship, which enables them to present their friendships in public. In undertaking these risky actions, these priests effectively change, albeit incrementally, the conditions and terms of celibacy to include the “normality” of their friendships. Nevertheless, “typicality” and “ordinariness” are representations of conformity that are bounded and limited by social principles and rules of conduct, which are maintained by bureaucratic intervention. The extent to which priests with friends are able to undertake social change is restricted because the papacy and its representatives attribute ordinariness to the maintenance of celibacy. Yet, by

¹³⁶ While I acknowledge that this dialectic between ontology and authenticity opens a debate within metaphysics, an investigation of the conflicting tension between these ideas is beyond the scope of the thesis.

continuing to engage in an ideological struggle that attempts to normalise their friendships within ordinary everyday social relations, these subalterns keep alive their hopes that their strategies of social inclusion will someday be publicly validated and formally acknowledged.

Conclusion: Having Listened

Having listened to the rhetorics of the papacy and priests with friends in which they argue respectively for and against celibacy, and having examined their mutual entailment, this conclusion draws together the multiple analyses of this research. Firstly, the three forms of rhetorics used to focus this study are summarized, along with those disjunctions that are highlighted within each rhetorical emphasis. Secondly, this conclusion reflects on the significance of this study both for anthropology and for the Church. Finally, conclusions are drawn that will hopefully extend the anthropological enterprise.

Summary

This research began with the challenge to understand how the papacy and priests with friends rhetorically negotiate their respective interests in celibacy and sexual intimacy, what is at stake in this contest, and how this competition impacts upon the priesthood and Church. Firstly, by outlining the literature reviews, fieldwork and research methods, and introducing the analytical position, namely, a social poetics approach, I established a foundation on which to conduct this study. This theoretical basis enabled me to utilize the formal and informal rhetoric of a dominant social group and the idiomatic arguments of subalterns to show how a contentious issue is strategically negotiated. As well, these ideas have helped to uncover the social dynamics of this rhetorical exchange in which subalterns recognize contradictions. In their endeavour to resolve these contradictions, disjunctions are created that produce social dissonance.

By analysing the forms of rhetoric used by the papacy and priests with friends, I have first focused upon ways in which they use their respective arguments to promote their corresponding views of social order. In chapter two, I examined how the papacy formally locates the terms of engagement in a total identity of the priest that is bound up in celibacy. When that total identity is breached, a priest is required to submit to the Sacrament of Penance to restore social order. Priests with friends, however, discern contradictions between institutional expectations and their experiences of celibacy, and consequently seek to renegotiate official controlling mechanisms within cultural intimacy to advantage their lives and ministry. Thus, an

abstract ideal that is essentialized and reified by a dominant social group can be seen to be unable to contain the meanings that are derived by subalterns from the contingent and complex conditions in which they live. Subsequently, these subalterns endeavour to informally resolve these contradictions through a rhetoric of resistance, but in doing so, they create disjunctions within the social order that produce social dissonance. Meanwhile, the dominant group, convinced that only its belief system has veracity, refuses to tolerate any change in social practice, a stance that also contributes to social conflict.

I have then shown how hegemony can secure social order through ritual, and the way in which it can be eroded and replaced by ideological struggle within this context. The third chapter considers the papacy's rhetorical promotion of an interpretation of Eucharist as sacrifice, which essentializes its belief system and hierarchical order in which celibacy is embedded, thereby upholding institutional exclusivity. Priests with friends, however, having engaged with changes in the Church and world, interpret Eucharist as a communal meal that promotes a different social order that is inclusive, and which accommodates their friendships. A dominant social group, therefore, has secured hegemony when subalterns agree to emphasise a particular interpretation of a ritual. Nevertheless, hegemony is never fixed. When subalterns no longer accept the dominant group's understanding of a practice, hegemony becomes subject to erosion. When erosion does occur, subalterns engage in an ideological struggle in which they seek to promote an alternative reinterpretation of a ritual that is meaningful to their lives. Such agency results in an aggressive defence by the dominant social group of its exclusive interpretations, but this results in social dissonance because subalterns continue to recognize contradictions in the official belief system and social order that they consider requires reform.

By tracing hegemony and its erosion in the broader Catholic context, chapter four reveals further aspects of the ideological contest over celibacy and sexual intimacy. In this analysis, I have shown how the transmission of hegemony is conveyed through key institutions that promote the normalcy of a practice. In the Church, social, familial and educational institutions have hegemonically shaped the upbringing of priests, in which they accepted celibacy without question. But as conditions changed, some priests have found that previously unencountered social

patterns have a degree of veracity but are inconsistent with the papacy's belief system and hierarchical order. These priests therefore argue that a disposition towards hermeneutic complexity and fluidity should be adopted within the Church, because such an attitude is able to take into account complex and contingent conditions. The papacy, however, obstructs these competing rhetorics by formally controlling stereotypes of celibacy with doctrine and canon law, which enables its representatives to police this practice. Thus, when an ideology of a dominant social group is eroded, fundamentalism is advocated as a means of restoring traditional principles. This restorationist movement ensures hegemony remains pervasive, for when subalterns use hegemony as a cover for illicit practices they unwittingly reinvigorate this process. Nonetheless, whilst the ideological struggle is confined to the margins, subalterns continue to search for meaning and entertain new hegemonies in which their interests are socially accepted by the masses.

The second focus is on how rhetoric has been used by the papacy and priests with friends to position an individual in social order through notions of morality, identity and stereotypes. In chapter five, I have shown how the papacy constructs etymologies from a discriminatory reading of a history of celibacy, which it uses to rhetorically fix its total moral vision in doctrine and canon law. I have then demonstrated how priests with friends resist these determinations by strategically relativising the papacy's view of morality in order to promote their own moral vision, inclusive of sexual intimacy, as a meaningful absolute for their lives and ministry. In this strategy, priests with friends attempt to contemporise morality by subtly promoting alternative notions of celibacy and related issues; a tactic that these priests consider challenges the papacy's absolute and eternal ideas about celibacy. These practices, however, create a disjunction between moral absolutism and moral relativism. Thus, in their struggle to promote their own moral vision, subalterns are able to tolerate a certain degree of flexibility, latitude and ambiguity. Conversely, a dominant social group cannot abide such doubt and compromise because its moral vision is absolutely fixed in eternity. Yet, this latter static position when rubbed constantly by the dynamic and different moralities of subalterns inevitably erodes the dominant moral vision.

Arguments that essentialize a particular identity also negotiate the positioning of an individual to social order. The papacy upholds an identity of the priest as celibate, which conforms to its belief system and hierarchical order, while priests with friends in reconfiguring their identity through their friendships resist that belief system and social order. Chapter six considers this dispute over identity from the perspective of the disjuncture between homogeneity and pluralism. The papacy, having created a uniform identity through iconicity by selecting nostalgic sources that are said to resemble celibacy, is convinced that celibacy is the only legitimate and authentic identity for the priesthood. Priests with friends also iconically construct images of celibacy and sexual intimacy from their diverse experiences but argue that there should be more than one relational option available to themselves and their confreres. Thus, the dynamic images constructed and informally promoted by subalterns produce disjunctions that contest the static moral system of a dominant social group. Yet, because a dominant social group protects formal communications from ideological challenge, there is little possibility of publicly resolving the dialectic between abstract beliefs and beliefs that are drawn from experience. Consequently, social dissonance continues to undermine homogeneity, whilst making room for a plurality of identities.

Images of morality and identity that are constructed and promulgated by a dominant social group are also made operative in the broader social context through stereotypes. In the seventh chapter, I have shown how the papacy and its local representatives use a rhetoric of control to unify formal images and stereotypes in patriarchy, a familial pattern upon which the Church is organized. I have then shown how various subordinated groups within the Church, including priests with friends, identify stereotypic inferiority in patriarchy. These subalterns can no longer concede to the social limitations that the fixed conceptions of the dominant social group impose upon them. Consequently, subalterns engage in an ideological struggle that seeks a resolution to their difficulties. In this struggle, subalterns use various rhetorics of resistance to overcome social limits that are constituted by a set of oversimplified standardized images. Such resistances are aimed at highlighting contradictions within the dominant moral system, thereby making space to promote favoured and alternative positions. These latter positions, however, produce disjunctions, which result in a contest between categories that are formal and

universally promoted and the informal and negotiated categories that are locally advanced. Yet, the efforts of subalterns to overcome stereotypes can only be small and piecemeal because a dominant social group prevents these individuals and groups from organizing themselves formally and publicly to contest these images.

In examining a third form of rhetoric, I have shown how a rhetoric of resistance used by priests with friends can shift to a rhetoric of radical change. In chapter eight, an analysis of worldviews that are respectively held by the papacy and priests with friends illuminates a cosmological disjunction. This disconnection is made apparent in the dialectical tension between ontology and authenticity. The papacy draws from its classical worldview, a rhetoric of static beliefs, concrete morality and uniform identities that is directly related to ontology, and an homogeneous celibate identity for the priesthood reflects that position. The papacy, therefore, denies opportunities that might result in social diversity. Nevertheless, priests with friends derive from a modern worldview, an argument for authenticity that gives preference to dialogical and internal knowledge of self in the context of ordinary everyday life. Moreover, these priests recognize that parts of the world and sections of the Church are not fundamentally opposed to their struggle for authenticity. Consequently, some of these priests are beginning to use a rhetoric of radical change in which they merge popular notions of the “typical priest” with the “ordinariness” of friendship, a social fusion that they express in public. Yet, these inventions have their limits because they are restricted by expectations of celibate conformity. Thus, subalterns read the barometer of public opinion concerning a particular social issue, before making a decision to publicly express a rhetoric of radical change. Such innovative practices can be tentative, for in this process, subalterns attempt to mobilise the masses to recognise the expediency of such reforms. By negotiating the process of radical change in incremental steps, subalterns aim to gather allies that are needed to empower them in later changes, which they hope will result in their aims finally being realised.

This research has analysed the diverse rhetorical practices of both the papacy and priests with friends in which a multitude of disjunctions are produced. The papacy as the dominant social group protects its religious, social and political interests by creating hegemonic conditions in which to promote its ideology, which is bound up

in celibacy. Each priest with a friend as a subaltern similarly advances his interests but does so from the periphery of the priesthood and without formal channels to promote his arguments for sexual intimacy. Thus, a lack of opportunities in which to resolve consequent disjunctions ensures that the Church as a religious culture will continue to endure discord and instability. The authority and power of a dominant group therefore remains under threat, and subalterns have little choice but to persevere in their hardships when opportunities to resolve social issues are not made available.

Dual Significance

This study has significance for the field of anthropology; firstly, because it shows how Herzfeld's study of cultural intimacy within Greece can be modified and extended. By opening up zones of intimacy through a cultural analysis of celibacy within the priesthood, I have amended Herzfeld's approach to examine the rhetorics of a religious culture that is not bounded by the geographical borders of a nation-state. *Phillip, Can I make the following claim?* Furthermore, this work demonstrates the flexibility of the theoretical scheme. I have demonstrated how Herzfeld's original plan can be reordered to accommodate and elucidate the rhetorical priorities of social actors in a different cultural context. This theoretical flexibility has been partially expressed in the order of the chapters in this thesis. By reordering the theoretical scheme, I have been able to show how the rhetorics of celibacy are expressed in the central and ritual events of the Church, from which other rhetorics flow.

Secondly, this research attends to the paucity of social knowledge about celibacy in anthropology by showing how celibacy is not simply a matter of sexual abstinence but can serve as a key image and practice in the construction and production of social organization. In this work, I demonstrate how the rhetorics of celibacy are neither static nor isolated. The disinterment of a buried history and an analysis of the religious, social and institutional aspects of celibacy reveal dynamic cultural activity. Furthermore, this dynamism, which is also expressed in social dissonance, demonstrates how various rhetorical strategies that surround an issue of significance can illuminate the larger social picture. Thus, this thesis provides an anthropological model that can be used and adapted to gain more insights into the multiple meanings

of sexuality, as well as other forms of social organization, which may be shaped and contested by a multitude of contingencies and complexities.

The other field that this study substantially contributes to is the Church. This work is unique in its approach to the study of celibacy. Its intermediate analytical position considers both the formal and social aspects of celibacy by constantly and consistently taking into account a myriad of binary choices and the social tension that keeps these priestly polarities connected. While this study acknowledges the reality and the importance of celibacy as essentialized and reified by the papacy, it also rejects its necessity by asserting the value of the position advanced by priests with friends. Consequently, this research records the rhetoric of both the papacy and priests with friends; however, these two discourses are in practice a single rhetoric of the priesthood that has a radical commonality. In acknowledging the existence of this shared status, this study challenges the essentialist claims and practices of the papacy and confronts complementary oppositions by situating the lived experience of priests with friends alongside the institutional expectations of the papacy. My research, in effect, makes space for religious and social criticism in the Church. This critical area takes into account the moral composition of celibacy in which social inequalities and inequities are probed and politicised. This methodological approach therefore may be suited to a study of other groups who are marginalized in the Church, including those that have been constantly alluded to in this research: the friends of priests.

The anthropological approach used in this study also has significant implications for the Church. Through the intermediary social lens of this research, I have demonstrated how formal relationships are intricately connected with informal relationships. This suggests that the Church is constituted and refracted not only through the universal policies of the papacy, but also by a diverse range of peoples in different cultures situated in local contexts. Thus, within cultural intimacy, belief and social order are intensely entailed within the relationship between the universal and local aspects of the one Church. This commonality suggests that the Church is constituted by diverse beliefs, which has ramifications for the way in which the Church is currently being administered. Similarly, from a supernatural perspective, this intermediary social lens implies that God's will is not confined to the rhetoric of

the papacy; rather, it is also expanded upon in the rhetoric of individuals and categorical groups, including priests with friends. Hence, when the papacy asserts itself as the sole judge of truth whilst discounting the insights of local peoples, it inevitably contributes to the production of divine, as well as social dissonance.

In Conclusion

At the outset of this research, and in my endeavour *to really listen* to the rhetorics of both the papacy and priests with friends, I adopted a social poetics approach to analyse this ethnography. As I began to organize this research, this work began to fall into particular patterns. In examining the material of a dominant social group and particular subalterns, I discovered that their respective rhetorics of control and resistance produced disjunctions, that attitudinal point of departure between the papacy and priests with friends that results in social dissonance. These disjunctions reflected the multiple meanings of celibacy and sexual intimacy in relation to the various contexts in which they were produced. Thus, the papacy, from the apex of the Church, endeavours to control the priesthood as a universal entity through homogenising policies, as reflected in celibacy. Conversely, priests with friends, from the periphery of the priesthood, attempt reform by advocating heterogeneous understandings, which accommodate their friendships. This multi-refracted dialectic, however, is contained in cultural intimacy because the papacy and priests with friends have a mutual interest in maintaining the position of the priesthood within the Church. The official façade of celibacy is, therefore, useful for securing a larger and joint investment, but priests with friends are socially disadvantaged in their quest for a reconfiguration of that investment. This frustrated quest, as reflected in disjunctions, results in social dissonance, because the rhetorics of subalterns are limited to the clandestine.

I also noticed that the rhetorics of control and resistance take on particular forms. These rhetorics are primarily organized in ways that either emphasise the social order or, conversely, give importance to positioning an individual in that social order. The first form of rhetoric shows how the papacy is able to promote a static belief system and hierarchical order through ritual and society. Within this belief system, a total identity of the priest, inclusive of celibacy, is promoted. By promoting an abstract principle and social relations through ritual, the papacy is able to bind priests to its

authority, and, as well, extend its homogenizing policies in the broader Catholic context. The second form of rhetoric used by the papacy is that which secures a total moral vision for the priest in which celibacy serves as a concrete moral boundary that protects its favoured notion of the priesthood. This form of rhetoric pressures individual priests to uphold the official belief system and hierarchical order through the performances of their lives and ministries. Such compliance ensures that priests individually contribute to the maintenance of their place and function within the priesthood and Church. The promotion of these two interdependent rhetorical forms by a dominant social group consequently limits subalterns to a stereotypical practice, which is a powerful force for creating conformity.

Subalterns, however, attempt to challenge the rhetorical forms of social order and positioning an individual in that order when they recognize contradictions in the hegemonic policies of a dominant social group. By drawing on their experiences, subalterns bring to ritual and society, a diversity of meaningful beliefs that contest the dominant belief system and social order. Subalterns also renegotiate the moral understandings they have of themselves, which impacts on the *status quo*. Priests with friends, therefore, promote a dynamic belief system in which they negotiate the contingencies and complexities of their lives and ministries with God and others. The belief system of these priests favours an egalitarian social order administered by democratic notions, a social order that can accommodate the friendships of these priests. Moreover, priests with friends argue that morality should not be so absolute that it can accommodate dialogue. They contend that an individual's position in society should not be limited by stereotypes but expanded to accommodate a person's authentic state. As a result, these subalterns advocate the necessity for public forums in which formal discussions should aim to resolve the conflict over celibacy, a claim that they perceive to be a responsible social and moral action.

An analysis of the rhetoric of the papacy, however, indicates that a dominant social group refuses to tolerate any change in social practice. After all, the papacy considers its belief system to be sacrosanct and the consequent social order beneficent. In order to protect that system, the papacy has made an aggressive defence by being fundamentalist in its approach to the ideological challenge made by priests with friends. In this defence, a dominant social group is shown to fix and

protect its belief system by excluding alternative ideologies from being advanced through the formal communication systems of a society. The ideological struggle of subalterns is therefore confined to the margins of society. Moreover, the rhetorical forms as constructed by a dominant social class prevent these individuals and groups from organizing themselves in ways that they can contest the imposition of stereotypical images. Consequently, the attempts of subalterns to bring about change can only be small and piecemeal.

Yet, the positioning of subalterns at the periphery of society is the crucible of change. While a dominant social group is so thoroughgoing in its opposition, and makes it extremely difficult for subalterns to bring about change, these latter individuals and groups must ultimately centralize their aims within the practices of a society if they are to achieve the reforms they desire. Some priests with friends, having read the barometer of public opinion, create another form of rhetoric, namely, that of radical change. In this form of rhetoric, an alternative ideology, which is reflected in part in the preferred aspect of a disjunction, is essentialized and reified through agency. These priests tentatively use a rhetoric of predominantly deed, but also of word, to present their friendships in public in the hope of eventually mobilizing the masses to recognize the expediency of their reforms. Yet, this action has its limits in the official and social expectations of celibacy. Thus, subalterns may test society's readiness for change, but social norms restrict their practices.

Ultimately subalterns have to go beyond the comfort zone of cultural intimacy to fully realize change. While priests with friends have a larger investment in the priesthood, the disjunctions produced by their attempts to resolve contradictions in the official rhetoric, undermines that stake. As a result, these priests are faced with a dilemma. At what point is a rhetoric of radical change worth the risk of their priesthood? A similar question may also be asked by the papacy: in view of the increasing social dissonance with the priesthood and Church, which undermines the value of its investment in the priesthood, at what point is a rhetoric of reconciliation with regard celibacy advisable? Hence, it appears that the stalemate over celibacy will possibly be dealt with in time. Yet, if time is to be the decisive factor, then at what cost to the priesthood and Church is the current maintenance of celibacy?

Indeed, the same can be asked of any issue that undermines both subalterns and the dominant social group?

Afterword: A Pathway to the Future of the Priesthood

This study contributes a greater understanding of the religious, social and political engagement between the papacy and priests with friends with regard to celibacy and sexual intimacy. It also raises issues of social inequity and sexual inequality within the priesthood and Church. The corollary of this abuse of power is a moral responsibility to argue against the continuation of this exclusive belief system, constituted by hierarchical order, patriarchy, and paternalism. Yet, this argument does not mean that the essentialisms of priests with friends should be uncritically adopted, for such logic is inherently dangerous. As has been demonstrated, essentializing one's own position threatens the coherence of religious truths and the social stability of the priesthood and Church. Thus, in the pursuit of justice and fairness, essentialisms must be avoided, which means any proposals that are bounded by restrictive and narrow definitions of the priesthood should be resisted. That this resistance is already apparent within the priesthood is reassuring. Priests generally consider themselves as belonging to a confraternity, and in this brotherhood, Eucharistic blood runs thicker than any ideology that denies communion.

Nonetheless, the rumblings of dissent over the essentialism of celibacy predominantly remain within the private thoughts and culturally intimate conversations and actions of priests with friends. These priests continue to unofficially criticize celibacy and love their friends, whilst still presiding over Eucharist and ministering in a manner that ostensibly maintains orthodoxy. Yet, these religious and social practices compound the problem since they reduce incentives for change. Priest with friends are still able to accommodate both their ministry and relationships, albeit with difficulty, which lessens their motivation for hastening reform. Consequently, social dissonance remains a problem of the priesthood that is unlikely to be resolved until the papacy and priests with friends agree to enter into mutual and equitable processes of dialogue and reconciliation.

Meanwhile, the papacy with self-assurance continues to promulgate its belief that God wills celibacy for the priesthood, which concomitantly discredits and demonises priests with friends. Priests with friends, however, argue that God is compassionate in their plight, and blesses their friendships. These priests' ever-present resentment

of the papacy's narrow and uniform prescriptions of celibacy can, therefore, only result in a continuing internecine struggle, which will damage the reputation and service of all priests. Such a combination of opposing beliefs sets a precarious path for the future of the priesthood.

Priests with friends, however, are not the only Catholics who desire reform. Some bishops and other reform-minded priests and laypersons also seek opportunities to express their grievances about celibacy and related issues. Nonetheless, these Catholics are severely constrained because the papacy demands that each priest, indeed, each and every Catholic, give uncritical support and passive obedience to its belief system and hierarchical order. In this hierarchical chain of command, no individual or group, other than the papacy, is given the responsibility or position to make decisions about this practice. In consequence, the papacy's unifying policy of celibacy denies the concerns and anxieties of reform-minded Catholics, and the needs and desires of priests and their friends. Such a policy prevents creative and imaginative solutions produced by those in the local Church from being recognized as valid and valuable contributions to the universal Church. Thus, the papacy must bear the primary responsibility for the widening rift within the priesthood and Church.

The gravity of this disagreement over celibacy can be further measured by an assessment of socially accepted standards. While priests with friends are judged by the papacy and the "pope's policemen" to be immoral and sinful, it is important to remember that the "heretical" expressions of these priests have a popular base within the Church. Inclusive idioms of priesthood not only occur in Western cultures and some indigenous cultures, but are also being produced to an extent at priestly gatherings in which collegiality is seen as an ideal. These gatherings include diocesan councils of priests and national conferences of bishops, whose predominant interests lie in the local Church. Nevertheless, when these priests and bishops seek formal dialogue and are prevented from doing so by the papacy, the official rhetoric that promotes celibacy as a gift to the Church convinces remains unconvincing.

Moreover, the papacy's actions can be counter-productive, for such authoritarianism fosters dissension and secrecy, sometimes resulting in the papacy becoming the butt

of humour and ridicule. Fr. Peter, for example, jokingly asked: *Why are there so many lumps in the Vatican carpet? ... Because that's where the papacy its secrets!* Ironically, these secrets are a part of the priestly confraternity. Not only do priests with friends and significant numbers of their confreres know how unrealistic official representations of celibacy are, it is paradoxically these insubordinate values and practices that encourage these priests to love, support, and defend the priesthood. They, with their own secrets, know that this is a part of belonging to the priesthood

Yet, priests with friends often have mixed feelings about such secrecy, as does Fr. John:

Sexual activity is not the problem. The real problem is secrecy... Over the centuries this wedding of institutional inflexibility with private licence has created an entire culture of secrecy, duplicity and fear that has ended up punishing those who tell the truth and rewarding those who defend the teachings, structures and deceptions that keep the system together.

As a result, Fr. John and other priests feel locked into a corrupt system, for to free oneself of this religious, social and political pattern involves the sacrifice of their priesthood. Thus, secrecy remains the principal means of communication in the priesthood because this pervasive pattern ensures that celibacy and related issues cannot be discussed. Here, an ironical parallel can be drawn, just as celibacy is supposed to transcend sexual intimacy, so too with secrecy, which can be seen to transcend dialogue and accountability. However, celibacy and secrecy devoid of divine truth is simply subversive, especially in a religious and social culture that idealises truth. The seeds for the demise of the papacy's belief system, therefore, are planted within its own hierarchical order, nourished, in part, by the tears and blood of priests with friends.

While some priests and laypersons satirize the loyalty of priests with friends, those who are on the "inside" give a vote of approval to the faithfulness of these priests to their friends and, indeed, their priesthood. These priests are generally regarded by those in the know as just as giving and loving as their celibate confreres and some would say, more so. Nevertheless, while certain bishops and priests insist that *[we should not] hang our dirty washing out in public*, secrecy is surely a lost cause from

the start. As there are sexual openings in the body personal that invite consummation, so too are there openings in the body politic that seek communion. Indeed, both the papacy and priests with friends seek a common goal of agreement. Yet, it is up to the former to share its resources with the latter so that these priests have sufficient means to resolve the difficulties they have with celibacy. Yet, priests with friends are not in themselves powerless, for they have a model and mentor in Jesus Christ. The onus then is on the papacy to exhibit Christian charity and compassion; similarly, it is the task of priests with friends to show Christ-like courage and holy impatience, for the papacy and each priest with friend are crucial and interdependent players of the one priesthood whose mission is to spread the Good News.

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APPENDIX A

(To be inserted)

APPENDIX B

Priests and Particular Friendships

Seminary Life

1. What were you taught about friendship, especially ‘particular friendship’ in the seminary?
2. How did this teaching affect seminary life?
3. How did this teaching affect your ability to personally relate with
 - a. friends?
 - b. family?
 - c. women?
4. Is there anything else you would like to say about seminary life?

Becoming a Parish Priest

5. How did this teaching affect your ability to relate once you became a parish priest in particular your ability to,
 - a. make friends?
 - b. relate with women?
 - c. communicate with other priests?
 - d. relate with parishioners?
6. Does this teaching still affect you, and if so in what way?

Particular Friendships

7. If you have a particular friendship (past or present), what have been the positives of having such a friendship?
8. How has this friendship contributed to your personal well-being?
9. What have been the difficulties in maintaining this relationship?
10. Given the institutional expectations, how do you “hold” particular friendship and the public image of singleness together.
11. Have there been previous particular friendships and what were the major reasons for termination?
12. Any other comments?

Your Relationship with God

13. How has particular friendship affected your relationship with God,
 - a. has it changed your understanding of God, and if so how?
 - b. has it changed the way you relate to God, and if so how?
14. Has this friendship helped you to grow in relationship to God and others, and if so how?
15. Any other comments?

Particular Friendship and its Effect on Your Parish Ministry

16. How has particular friendship affected your priestly ministry,
 - a. in what way has it benefited?
 - b. in what way has it made ministry more difficult?
17. If it has made ministry more difficult, how have you dealt with this in order to continue ministry?
18. Any other Comments?

Celibacy

19. If you have a particular friendship, has this caused inner conflict because of your promise/vow of celibacy,
 - a. if so, in what way?
 - b. how have you coped?
20. If you are sexually active, how have you prioritised this over the celibate state?
21. During seminary training what were you taught or what inferences were made about celibacy and/or sexuality.
22. What was your reaction to this?
23. What are your thoughts on Canon 277 (the canon requiring celibacy for priesthood)?
24. Are there any comments you would like to make about the institutional Church in relation to this issue?

Loneliness

25. How does loneliness affect your personal self?
26. How do you cope with your loneliness?
27. How does your loneliness affect your relationship with God?
28. How does your loneliness affect your ministry?
29. If you long for a particular friend, what factors have prevented you from finding such a friend?
30. Any other comments?

If you wish to make further contact or enquire about the research's progress, please don't hesitate to contact me. Thank you for contributing to this research. You have shown much courage. May God Bless You.

Please return Questionnaire to: Jane Anderson, 17 Mokare Road, ALBANY WA, 6330.